DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 905 CE 066 123

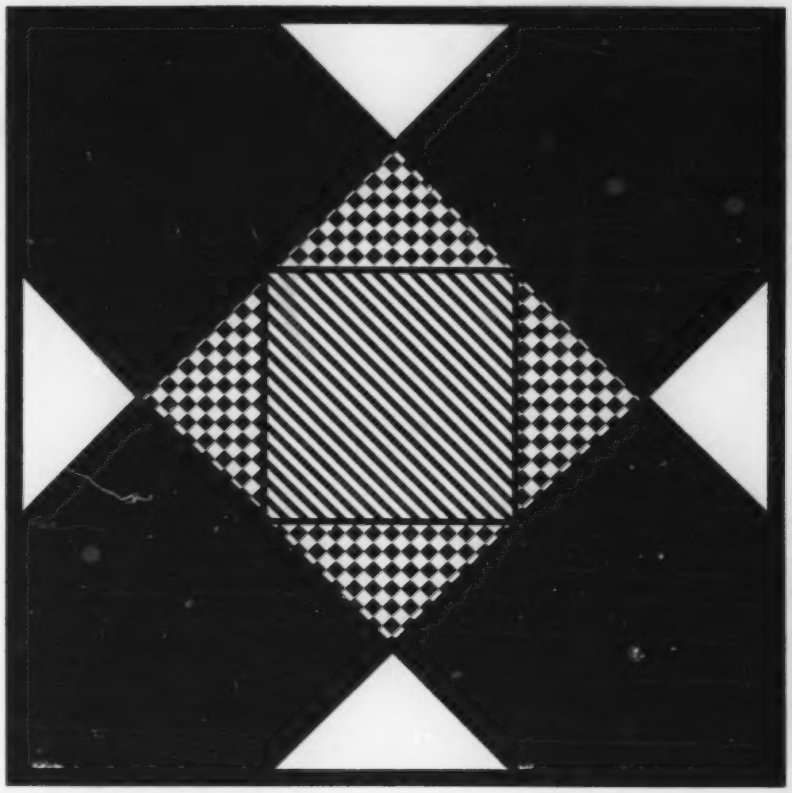
AUTHOR	Imel, Susan; And Others
TITLE	More than the Sum of the Parts: Using Small Group Learning in Adult Basic and Literacy Education. A 353 Special Demonstration Project.
INSTITUTION	Ohio State Univ., Columbus. Center on Education and Training for Employment.
SPONS AGENCY	Ohio State Dept. of Education, Columbus. Div. of Educational Services.
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	90p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publications, Center on Education and Training for Employment, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090 (order no. SP68: $8 plus $3 postage and handling in Ohio, $3.50 out of state).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Basic Education; Basic Skills; Curriculum Development; *Group Activities; Learning Activities; *Literacy Education; Numeracy; *Small Group Instruction; *Staff Development; Student Developed Materials; *Student Role; Teacher Role; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	353 Project

ABSTRACT

This guide provides practical information that teachers and administrators can use to initiate the small group learning approach in adult basic and literacy education (ABLE). A locator index directs readers to specific topics. Chapter 1 describes small group learning, provides a rationale, and points out advantages and disadvantages for learners, instructors, and administrators. Chapter 2 provides tips for managing small group learning. It discusses the changed roles of teachers and learners and the nuts and bolts of facilitation. Chapter 3 concentrates on preparing learners for small group learning and suggests some activities for introducing the approach. Chapter 4 contains examples of activities that can be used to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of adult learners, including tips for developing additional activities. Chapter 5 describes a process for involving learners in generating materials through the use of scenarios or simulations based on learners' life experiences or current context. Chapter 6 covers staff development to support small group learning. Chapter 7 provides a summary of advice for teachers on using small groups and instructional materials. Appendixes include the following: a list of 41 references; an annotated bibliography that includes information about 16 print resources for further information; addresses of Ohio's state and regional literacy resource centers; and an ERIC Digest, "Managing Your Professional Development." (YLB)

More than the Sum of the Parts

ED 368 905



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Using Small Group Learning in Adult Basic and Literacy Education

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A 353 Special Demonstration Project

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1900 Kenny Road
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1994

FUNDING INFORMATION

Project Title: Enhancing Quality in Adult Basic and Literacy Education through Small Group Learning

Source of Contract: Ohio Department of Education
Division of Educational Services
Columbus, Ohio 43266-0308

Contractor: Center on Education and Training for Employment
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1090

Executive Director: Ray D. Ryan

Disclaimer: Funds for producing and distributing this publication were provided by the Ohio Department of Education under authority of Section 353 of the Adult Education Act, P. L. 100-297 as amended. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Ohio Department of Education nor the U.S. Department of Education, and no endorsement should be inferred.

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Foreword

Traditionally, a one-on-one individualized approach to instruction has predominated in adult basic and literacy education. Recently, the use of small groups has been advocated as an effective approach for improving the quality of adult basic and literacy education and support for the use of the small group approach is expanding. Despite the growing evidence supporting the use of small group learning as a strategy that will improve the quality of adult basic and literacy education services, there has been little practical information to guide the implementation of this approach.

The development of this publication was funded to address the need for practical information that can be used by teachers and administrators to initiate the small group learning approach in adult basic and literacy education. Its development was based on information from existing publications as well as information obtained from Ohio practitioners experienced in using the small group learning approach. Of special importance in this regard are the following individuals who participated in a one-day meeting and discussed their experiences as well as made recommendations for the contents of the publication: Charley Flaig, Northwest Local Schools, McDermott, Ohio; Amy Leedy, Montgomery County Joint Vocational School, Clayton, Ohio; Barbara Shapiro, Leo Yassenoff Jewish Community Center, Columbus, Ohio; and Michael Jones, Consultant, Adult Basic and Literacy Education, Ohio Department of Education.

The publication was developed by Susan Imel, Project Director, and Sandra Kerka and Sandra Pritz, both of whom served as project staff. Janet Ray served as word processor operator.

Prior to publication, the guide was reviewed by the following people: Charley Flagg; Barbara Shapiro; Michael Jones; Sue Polzella, Kettering Adult School, Dayton, Ohio; Ann Carr, Mid-East Ohio Vocational School District, Zanesville, Ohio; Alayne Michaelis, Licking County Joint Vocational School, Newark, Ohio;

and Bettina Lankard and Nancy Puleo, Program Associates, Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University.

Ray D. Ryan
Executive Director
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Introduction

You get the idea that there's no pressure, then you can relax. In a group, the class works together. One-on-one has more pressure. With a tutor you have to use the skill that you've learned in group. That's motivating.

I love to be in a group. We help each other, like each other. I love to be around people, don't know what it would be like to be separate. I expected to be with an individual tutor, but I like the group. It helps me to help other people, it makes me feel good about myself. We love each other, help each other to learn. It's something to tell your grandkids. I never finished high school, I have to do it for myself. (Bingman et al. 1990, p. 6)

These comments from adult learners in Tennessee testify to the value of small group learning in adult literacy and basic education. The learners quoted have positive feelings about learning in small groups. Teachers in Tennessee are also enthusiastic about using small groups:

When we get in groups we are all adults and we teach each other. There is no distinction. We team teach. We have multiple tutors in the group; we alternate nights.

Every class is a new experience. They get caught up in it, answer each other's questions.

We were scared to death of groups at first. But after the first class, we saw there was no need to be frightened. Lessons fell in place once we got the group together. (Bingman et al. 1990, p. 5)

If we continue with the way tutoring services are set up now (one-on-one), there is no way on God's green Earth that we are ever going to reach more than 10 percent of the people in need of literacy services.

(Toni Cordell in McAdoo and Gordon 1993, p. 1)

Yet, practitioners have been slow to adopt small group learning. Many stick to the more traditional one-on-one, individualized approach to instruction (ibid.; Roskos 1990). Undoubtedly, there are a number of reasons for this reluctance to use small group learning—habit, fear, and lack of knowledge about how to use small group learning effectively.

This guide provides information that will help you use small group learning in adult basic and literacy education. It is based on both the experiences of Ohio adult basic and literacy education (ABLE) practitioners and information from the literature. Several ABLE practitioners who regularly use the small group approach met with project staff and discussed their experiences. They provided valuable information not only about using small groups in ABLE settings, but also about what types of information the publication should contain. Later, these individuals reviewed the proposed outline for the publication. To collect additional practice-based information, other Ohio ABLE practitioners were interviewed.

Existing print resources were also reviewed. A search of the ERIC database resulted in a number of publications about small groups, including some developed abroad. An annotated bibliography of print resources in Appendix A includes information about many of the publications that were used to develop this guide. Here is what you will find in this guide:

- Chapter 1 DESCRIBES small group learning, provides a RATIONALE, and points out ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES for learners, instructors, and administrators.

- Chapter 2 provides TIPS FOR MANAGING small group learning. It discusses the CHANGED ROLES of teachers and learners and the nuts and bolts of FACILITATION.

- Chapter 3 concentrates on PREPARING LEARNERS for small group learning and suggests some activities for introducing the approach.

- Chapter 4 contains examples of ACTIVITIES that can be used to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of adult learners, including tips for developing additional activities.

- Chapter 5 describes a process for INVOLVING LEARNERS IN GENERATING MATERIALS through the use of scenarios or simulations based on learners' life experiences or current context.

- Chapter 6 covers STAFF DEVELOPMENT to support small group learning.

- Chapter 7 provides a summary of ADVICE for teachers on using small groups and instructional materials.

- Appendix A provides a number of RESOURCES for further information, including names of Ohio ABLE personnel involved in using small groups.

- Appendix B contains an ERIC Digest, ***Managing Your Professional Development: A Guide for Part-Time Teachers of Adults.***

The Locator Index on the next page directs you to places in the guide that cover specific topics in which you are interested.

LOCATOR INDEX

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1. Small Group Learning: What and Why

If you are unfamiliar with small group learning, you probably have many questions about using the approach with adult basic and literacy education learners. This chapter is designed to answer the **what** and **why** questions of small group learning:

- What is it and how does it differ from other instructional approaches?
- Why is it suitable for use with adult basic and literacy learners?
- What are its advantages and disadvantages?
- How will it benefit you as a teacher and your students as learners?
- What is your administrator likely to think about this approach?

What Is Small Group Learning?

Small group learning is much more than a collection of individuals sharing the same space—it enables learners to share and work with others. By creating a rich and complex environment in which learning occurs, the group itself becomes a central part of the learning experience. Individuals learn both in and through the group. The small group—

- has a defined membership
- thinks of itself as a group
- shares a common purpose
- satisfies a learning need through interdependence
- influences individual growth through the development of group goals
- interacts and communicates with each member
- influences each member
- makes decisions and acts as one
- allows individuals to move between and among other learning approaches, including whole group and one-on-one instruction

(Ennis and Davison 1989)

At issue is not small group learning versus other approaches. In their adult roles, learners move in and out of different modes all the time. Using small group

learning in combination with other approaches such as large group and one-on-one instruction, you create a setting that more closely resembles their life experiences. Acquiring literacy is a complex process that requires a combination of learning approaches. As the teacher or facilitator, you must decide which approach is appropriate at different times for different purposes (ibid.).

(Chapter 2, **Small Learning Groups: How**, contains information that can guide these decisions.)

You may have heard the terms *collaborative*, *cooperative*, and *participatory* in conjunction with small groups. Associated with each of these terms is an attitude or underlying philosophical belief about learners and their appropriate role in teaching and learning.

Collaborative learning—

- assumes that knowledge is socially rather than individually constructed by communities of individuals
- assumes that the shaping and testing of ideas is a process in which anyone can participate
- views the facilitator not as the authority and source of knowledge but as an equal participant in the learning (Imel 1991)

Cooperative learning—

- shares some of the characteristics of collaborative learning, but is more structured
- allows the teacher or facilitator to retain more control over the learning
- has small groups working toward a common goal, but emphasizes individual rather than group accountability (Millis 1991)

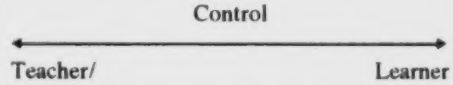
Participatory learning—

- draws on learners' lived experiences as the basis for curriculum (Auerbach 1992)
- proposes that "instead of trying to *cover* content that has been predetermined, teachers need to *discover* content that's important to their own students" (ibid., p. 1)
- enables learners to determine the content

Cooperative, collaborative, and participatory approaches to learning are all compatible with and use small group learning. As the teacher or facilitator, you are in charge of how you use the small group approach—collaboratively, cooperatively, in a participatory manner, or in some combination of the three.

Role Continuum

Control moves back and forth between teachers and learners.



When considering small group learning, it might be helpful to think of the roles of teachers and learners as being on a continuum with "teacher/facilitator in control" at one end and "learners in control" at the other. As the teacher/facilitator, you may choose to retain more control over the learning or you may choose to put more authority in the hands of the learners. Chances are control over the learning will move back and forth between you and the learners, varying with the kinds and types of small group learning experiences being used. However, by its very nature, use of small group learning does result in more learner-centered and collaborative environments.

Why Use Small Groups?

A major catalyst for the use of small groups has been a desire for the learning environment to be more like the contexts in which adults generally use literacy skills. Use of this approach acknowledges that literacy is a social process (Bingman et al. 1990; Ennis 1990). Small group learning enables people to learn from their interactions with each other and from their environment, just as in real life. It assumes that everyone has something to share, something worthwhile to contribute, as well as something to learn (Clark and Lawson 1990). It also provides a learning environment that is more learner centered and collaborative.

During the first week, a student-initiated group conversation about their illiteracy took place. This "opening up" . . . greatly helped the "gelling" of the group. . . . I take these opportunities to help students understand more about learning: to try to instil confidence and to encourage them to see themselves as active learners rather than passive imbibers of education.

(Barbara Goulbourn, in Ennis and Davison 1989, p. 26)

Small groups are also ideal for using language experience or whole language instructional approaches, both of which are being adopted more widely in adult literacy and basic education. Because these approaches use both written and oral language for "personally meaningful purposes while learning through active processes in the social community of the classroom," they use small groups to incorporate personal experiences into adult literacy instruction (Roskos 1990, p. 6). Many ABLE students have experienced failure in num-

erous ways. For these learners, small groups can help develop their concept of self-worth, coping skills, and enjoyment of learning. By providing a variety of experiences, small groups can—

- facilitate the development of commitment both to the group and its decisions and to the learning process
- encourage meaningful interaction with others
- promote the development of problem-solving procedures through learning to evaluate critically the ideas of others
- provide a background for understanding the effect of communication and for developing awareness of other people

(Bova 1985)

Small groups should not supplant other approaches; rather, they should be used in combination with one-on-one and/or large group instruction (Bingman et al. 1990; Ennis and Davison 1989; Gaber-Katz and Watson 1990). The use of small groups has both advantages and disadvantages.

What Are the Disadvantages of the Small Group Approach?

Students don't need to be at the same level, but all must be able to read or write something. The levels shouldn't be too disparate. The lower level students often progress faster than they would one on one.

(Joey Thiele, personal interview, September 1993)

Although at first the amount of time spent in preparation may be lengthy, often work prepared for one session will extend over a number of weeks so that preparation time may in fact be reduced.

(ALBSU 1982, p. 10)

- Accommodating a wide range of needs and abilities is difficult in a small group. Learners may not only have conflicting goals but also different rates of learning.
- The needs of individuals in a group have to be reconciled with the needs of the group as a whole and thus tension may arise.
- Negotiating a learner-centered curriculum in a group can be very hard work.
- Compared to one-on-one tutoring, a small group requires more preparation time. Establishing groups can be time consuming. The small group approach may double preparation time (Ottoson et al. 1985).
- Some learners are simply not comfortable with the idea of group participation.
- Use of groups may result in a variety of learner management issues as some individuals may "free load," some may socialize rather than stay on task, and others may be disruptive or domineering.

- In addition to teaching skills, tutors/teachers also need group leadership skills for the group to be successful.

(Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit 1982; Bingman et al. 1990; Gaber-Katz and Watson 1990; Ottoson et al. 1985; Tibbetts and Klein n.d.)

Based on their experiences with small groups, the focus group that helped develop this guide identified some reasons why learners and teachers may be reluctant to use small groups.

Why Learners May Not Like Small Groups

- Cultural traditions may inhibit some individuals from participating in small groups. For example, small group learning is not used as an educational approach in some cultures, and some individuals do not speak in mixed gender groups because of culturally dictated conventions.
- Some students (for example, those studying for the GED examination) are focused on a specific goal and don't want to "waste their time." Some learners may consider groups a frill or a sideshow.
- Work environments may affect learners' perspectives on groups. Those from worksites emphasizing individual achievement (piece work) may not be familiar with small group work. Others, such as shift workers, may want to be "left alone" after working with people all day.
- Because group work is unlike traditional schooling, learners may feel they are "doing the teacher's job" or wasting their time. If they do not achieve their goals, they may blame it on the teaching method. Small group work puts more responsibility on the learner.
- Those who are independent learners may find small groups to be incompatible with their learning style.
- Learners may have opinions about the appropriateness of group work in terms of subjects, feeling it is okay for some subjects but not for others.

- The environment resulting from small groups may bother some learners. For example, some may find the noise level problematic, those who are easily distracted may have difficulty keeping on task, and those who need more structure may feel small groups are "messy." Small group work may result in learners having to deal with personality conflicts, which may be outside their experience.

Why Teachers May Not Like Small Groups

- Older experienced teachers may regard small groups as a fad or the "flavor of the month."
- Since the small group approach goes against the norm in ABLE, teachers find it unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable.
- Teachers may have preconceived ideas about group work and they may view it as interfering with their other agendas (such as completing official paperwork, grading papers from their day classes).
- Implementing the small group learning approach requires many changes. For example, traditional instructional materials cannot be used with small groups. Some physical environments may inhibit small groups and some cannot be changed to accommodate small groups satisfactorily.
- Teachers must deal with problems and issues of social interaction, conflict, dominance, and gender. For example, males in some cultural groups may feel threatened and spouses may disapprove of learners' group association. Personality conflicts among students may also arise.
- Teachers may be confronted with administrator/director opposition to group work. For example, administrators concerned with meeting state requirements may believe that individual instruction, rather than small groups, improves unit costs.

Dealing with New Students

1. If the group is working quietly, the teacher could talk to the new student, describing the course and trying to get an idea of the student's abilities and needs.
2. If the group is having a discussion, the new student could be introduced and left to decide whether to join in.
3. If subgroups are working, the teacher could either spend time talking to the new student or introducing him/her to a subgroup to watch or take part if and when ready.

(ALBSU 1982)

- The open entry/open exit format of many ABLE programs complicates small group work. New students coming in at all times interfere with group work because they need to be attended to immediately by the instructor or be lost to the program. New students also have to be integrated into existing groups.
- The small group approach requires different management skills and will take more time at first. For example, when implementing small groups, teachers may have to deal with learners' fears of prior schooling experiences and help learners acquire group skills such as staying on task. Different approaches to assessment may be required.

What Are the Advantages of the Small Group Approach?

- It allows for integration of critical thinking and other language processes. Talking, listening, writing, and reading can be interrelated, and the spoken word can interact with the written word.
- It allows learners to develop, practice, and refine skills that are important for today's workplace, including teamwork and problem solving.
- By creating opportunities for learners to experience and observe the learning of others, it permits them to expand their repertoire of learning strategies.
- It breaks down the isolation and stigma frequently experienced by adults with insufficient literacy skills and provides peer support for their learning.
- It is more comfortable for many learners because it is compatible with their learning styles.
- It enhances learners' self-esteem by helping them understand that they have much to offer as a result of their experiences.
- Through the collective expertise of the group members, it makes available a wide range of resources, including the thinking, experience, help, and encouragement of other group members.

A newspaper column was turned into a play for a dramatic reading. Students practiced it for homework, and the principal videotaped it so students could observe themselves. The tape was later used at conferences for presentations. One second-grade-level reader who attended a presentation got up and said he wanted to tell these people "I'm a reader now."

(Joey Thiele, personal interview, September 1993)

It can fracture clique-ishness—including kinds based on stereotypical conceptions of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other forms of difference. It can help you empower all your students—especially the ones who lack power traditionally because of their membership in a culturally oppressed group.

(LeCourt and Miller 1992, p. 2)

- It can help meet the diverse and complex needs of learners: high achievers can serve as tutors and low achievers can share in the success of their peers.
- It eases the distinction between teachers/tutors and learners by creating a cooperative, participative environment that is less hierarchical than traditional environments.
- It can provide a transition between large group and individual or one-on-one instruction. For example, having learners discuss a topic in a small group before it is treated in a large group can encourage more equal participation for all students.

(Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit 1982; Bingman et al. 1990; Cheatham and Lawson 1990; Ennis 1990; Ennis and Davison 1989; Gaber-Katz and Watson 1990; LeCourt and Miller 1992; Ramirez 1992; Tibbetts and Klein n.d.)

Besides these advantages cited in the literature, the focus group that helped develop this guide thought of the advantages of the small group approach in terms of learners, teachers/facilitators, and administrators.

For **learners**, small group work may—

- satisfy needs for belonging/affiliation
- be more efficient than other methods. Learners can receive help from their peers and avoid "dead time" waiting for help from the teacher
- teach team skills and oral communication skills, which are also employability and life skills
- provide a vehicle for sociability and friendships—learners can save money by carpooling, sharing babysitting with other learners, and so forth
- serve as a source of information and help from other learners who have experienced similar problems (with social service agencies and so forth)
- accommodate different learning styles through varied explanations offered by different group members—peers can sometimes provide alternate explanations that allow learners to "get it"
- provide greater depth of learning

The difference between staying with the program and leaving prematurely is often related to the degree to which the student becomes involved with other members of the class. . . . Education for the adult basic student can be a long and lonely process, and the day-to-day encouragement that classmates give each other is probably more important than that which students can derive from either the teacher or family. . . . Another support-related benefit is in the actual assistance one student may receive from another; this may be with classwork or homework or in another way such as transportation to class.

(Davis and Davis 1987, p. 18)

At the end of one of our first small group sessions . . . a student remarked, "I was thinking about quitting after tonight, but I had so much fun in the group that I'm going to come back."

(Sue Polzella, personal communication, September 1993)

For **teachers**, the small group learning approach may—

- facilitate higher retention
- be a time-saving device and a means of increasing efficiency; teachers don't have to answer the same question multiple times or say something "once and for all"; learners can serve as peer teachers
- facilitate the handling of multiple levels through mixed ability groups and provide a challenging environment for lower-level learners
- provide a means of professional development
- by changing the nature of the learner-teacher interaction, create a more interdependent relationship between teachers and learners
- provide relief from always serving as the expert by drawing on the resources of the group

Administrators may find the small group approach advantageous because—

- it can result in higher retention rates and thus more contact hours
- it is likely that use of small groups will become a program quality indicator and hence their use will be an accountability factor for funding
- the employability skills small groups promote may enable learners to become employed and/or get better jobs, thus providing additional accountability factors

Summing Up

Clearly, the small group learning approach does not represent "business as usual" in adult basic and literacy education. If it is implemented appropriately, however, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. For teachers and learners accustomed to more traditional approaches, implementing small groups will take time. Teachers will need to develop different instructional approaches and materials, become familiar with and

practice group management skills, and introduce learners to learning in small groups. Learners will need to be introduced to small group learning and later invited to reflect on how the small group helped them achieve their learning goals. The next section of the guide addresses many of the disadvantages by describing how to implement the small group learning approach.

2. Small Group Learning: How

This chapter provides the following information you can use to develop small groups that are functioning and effective:

- The changing role of teachers and learners
- Group process and the responsibilities of the teacher/facilitator
- Tips on creating a hospitable environment
- Strategies for facilitating small groups
- Forming groups

Simply meeting in a small group does not create an effective learning environment. Small groups often fall into one of four categories: dysfunctional (no participation from members); leaderless (no exchange of ideas); on-task (willing to talk and listen but no sharing of meaningful information); and functioning (on-task and involved). Although most groups go through several stages, the ideal is *functioning* because there is a sense of trust and an expectation that learning will occur (Cheatham and Lawson 1990).

According to Bingman et al. (1990), effective groups are—

- small in size, ranging from 5 to 15 learners;
- learner centered, adapting the curriculum to the needs and interests of learners;
- experiential, incorporating learners' experiences, skills, and ideas in the teaching;
- cooperative—learners commonly help each other and work together; and
- participatory—learners have a say in what is taught and how it is taught, rather than being passive recipients (p. 2).

Changing Roles of Teachers and Learners

> *[The teacher] is viewed as part of the family. She is our teacher, but in a different way, a leader through something you want to get out of your life.* (Bingman et al. 1990, p. 7)

The group learned how similarly they felt about many things, and people identified strongly with one another. My role in the discussion just about faded away . . . the most compelling worries and joys that people wanted to talk about were not ones I shared—they were about the anxieties that stem from poverty and not understanding the dominant language. I became a listener, noting the issues that we could address in future classwork.

(Nash et al. 1992, p. 6)

The small group learning approach changes the role of the teacher. It will make you a teacher "in a different way." It will change how you interact with the learners.

When small groups are used, the instructional environment usually becomes more learner (as opposed to teacher) directed, and the learners have more of a role in helping shape the learning than in more traditional approaches. Learners become partners with the teacher in deciding on and directing the learning experiences. The teacher's traditional role as the authority and transmitter of knowledge changes and the teacher works "in a different way." The teacher becomes a facilitator and co-learner by entering into a process of mutual inquiry with the learners; instead of giving specific answers or telling learners what to do, he or she offers opinions (Gillespie 1990; MacGregor 1990; Sheridan 1989).

The more traditional teacher-directed classroom can be compared with a learner-directed environment in the following ways:

Teacher Directed	Learner Directed
• Formal class • Teacher knows all • Teacher makes decisions • Teacher directs students	• Informal class • All class members contribute information and are valued and respected • Students make decisions about what they need to learn and how they learn best • Teacher assists and supports students as needed

Learners and teachers accustomed to a traditional learning setting need to be prepared for the small group approach. The next chapter, **Getting Started**, focuses on preparing learners. The remainder of this chapter describes what you as a teacher need to do to implement small groups.

Group Process: The Essentials

By this stage in your life, you have undoubtedly had lots of experiences being a group member, including responsibility for group leadership. Some groups work better than others. When a group works well, its members look forward to being together and working on the task at hand. How a group functions is frequently referred to as the *group process*. Group process simply means **what** is done in a group as well as **how** it is done (Ennis and Davison 1989).

Group process can also be thought of in terms of the **task** and **maintenance** functions of groups. Task functions are those contributions that help the group accomplish its task; they contribute to the group accomplishing its goals or the **what** part of group process. Maintenance functions, on the other hand, are those that help the group develop or maintain itself as a group (as opposed to simply a collection of individuals); they contribute to the **how** part of group process (Tibbetts and Klein n.d.). Examples of group task and group maintenance functions include the following:

Task Functions	Maintenance Functions
• Initiating	• Encouraging
• Procedure developing	• Expressing
• Information seeking and giving	• Relieving tension
• Opinion seeking and giving	• Compromising
• Clarifying	• Listening
• Summarizing	

Some functions, including mediating, testing for agreement, and evaluation, fall into both the task and maintenance categories (ibid.).

Maintenance functions are particularly important because they contribute to group cohesiveness, which is the ability of the group to "stick together." In a cohesive group, the members feel attached to the group and close to the other group members. Developing cohesive groups is important because members are more likely to

persist, be supportive and accepting of each other, and form close relationships (Rutland and Guglielmino 1987).

Although learners may eventually be responsible for assuming task and maintenance functions, you will need to perform many of the functions at first. As a part of preparing them for group work, you will also want to make learners aware of the two types of functions and their relationship to how groups work. Some learners will naturally gravitate to performing various task and maintenance functions. For example, task-oriented learners will likely assume responsibility for ensuring that the group starts and carries out its assignments. Those learners for whom relationships are more important may assume responsibility for maintaining the group by encouraging the members or helping develop compromise solutions.

See "Preparing Learners for Small Groups" on page 27 for more information on group roles.

Vast quantities of material are available on groups and group process. The list of resources in Appendix A contains suggestions for further reading and study in this area.

The Teacher as Facilitator

In your role as a facilitator, your responsibilities will differ somewhat from those traditionally associated with being a teacher. One of your major responsibilities will be establishing a climate in which small group learning can occur. But you will also be responsible for carrying out the steps necessary to implement small group learning. The practical information presented here should help you accomplish both of these duties.

Creating a Hospitable Learning Environment

To prepare for small group learning, you must consider both the physical and psychosocial environment. It is essential that the environment does not feel like a traditional classroom because ABLE learners frequently have negative feelings about their previous educational experiences. The goal is to create an environment in

Questions to Consider

1. Can the room be arranged to accommodate small groups?
2. How can learners be involved in deciding on an appropriate physical arrangement?
3. Can learners be responsible for arranging the room and, if necessary, putting it back in its original condition?
4. Where should resources to support small group learning be located?
5. Who can contribute to this resource collection?

which learners can gain confidence that they can learn (Gillespie 1990).

The Physical Environment. Working in small groups requires a room that can accommodate physical changes, especially if small groups are to be integrated with both large group and individual work. Frequently, small groups work in circles. As the facilitator, you will be part of the circle with no distinction between your place and the learners' places. Such a physical arrangement visually conveys the idea that the teacher is a participant as well as a resource and allows the learners to think of themselves as resources on a par with the teacher/facilitator (Clarke 1991b).

In addition to having a room in which furniture can be rearranged to accommodate small group work, you also need a space for a resource corner containing materials to support learning activities. As a part of their role as learning resources, learners can be encouraged to loan or contribute items to the resource collection. The resource collection can expand as learners identify resources they need as well as those they can provide. Books that are different from those used in public school classrooms and that learners can borrow can be an important part of the resource collection (ibid.; Rutland and Guglielmino 1987).

Because many ABLE programs share sites with other programs, you may not have the luxury of having your own room. Or your facility may have furniture that does not readily accommodate small group work. For example, traditional school desks are cumbersome and, even when arranged in a circle, they don't create an environment that fosters cohesiveness. Also, if you are sharing rooms with other classes, you and the learners may need to make sure you leave everything the way you found it. Finally, some administrative policies may discourage developing appropriate physical environments. These deterrents are not insurmountable, but they provide challenges that must be addressed in creating a physical climate conducive to small group learning.

Unless all students feel comfortable sharing their issues, ideas and experiences, the curriculum will be heavily weighted toward the needs of the more vocal students . . . it is also important . . . to allow for differences in individual personalities and culture, and not to push any one person too hard.

(Nash et al. 1992, p. 53)

The Psychosocial Climate. Establishing an appropriate physical environment begins the process of helping learners feel comfortable and accepted. You must also create and foster a suitable psychosocial climate. Small group learning flourishes best in an environment in which learners feel free to exchange ideas and share experiences. Therefore, it should be nonthreatening and democratic, discouraging hostile competition as well as encouraging mutual respect for the ideas and opinions of others (Sheridan 1989).

Once small group learning becomes an established part of the learning activities, learners can share the responsibility of creating and fostering an appropriate environment. Until then, it is up to you as the facilitator to take the lead by—

With beginning level learners, teachers can easily fall into patronizing and controlling behaviors . . . there are times when a participatory approach doesn't work: when there isn't enough common language to determine collaboratively the direction of the class. With carefully thought out language activities, opportunities to communicate ideas through nonlinguistic forms of expression and clear and simple questioning and focused listening, students' beginning language can be used to convey meaning about the things in their lives that are important to them.

(Nash et al. 1992, p. 9)

- demonstrating a pleasant and caring attitude toward learners, including patience, acceptance, and tolerance
- confirming that learners are significant to you by remembering their names and personal information
- demonstrating sensitivity to both verbal and nonverbal behavior
- keeping communication open and fair, permitting all learners to have a chance to participate in discussions
- establishing group norms by helping to set ground rules for the group
- accepting the contributions of learners as worthwhile
- encouraging learners to explore and understand differences while reconciling disagreements

(Ennis and Davison 1989; Sheridan 1989)

Some Nuts and Bolts of Group Facilitation

Initially, your goal should be to help learners gain confidence and learn the ground rules of talking and discussing so that they can "go it alone" in small groups (ALBSU 1982). How you handle your role as group facilitator will set the tone for the group since you will be modeling group leadership skills. Consider the following:

Examples of Open and Closed Questions

Open—

1. What do you think about the health care reform proposals?
2. Why did you decide to return to school?
3. What was your most important learning experience and why?

Closed—

1. Which Ohio Senator voted for the Brady Bill?
2. Who won the World Series last year?
3. What does 7 X 7 equal?

Questions to Consider

1. Do you display consistent behavior toward all group members?
2. Are you more interested in conflict- or problem-free sessions or those in which a lot of learning occurs?
3. Do you respond in such a way to learner contributions (for example, saying "Yes," "No," "Good point") that learners feel pleasing you is more important than actually contributing to the discussion?
4. Do you ask questions to which the answers are readily evident?
5. Do you allow students to help each other when working individually or do you always assume the role of knowledge authority? (ALBSU 1982)

Types of Questions. The types of questions you use can have a significant influence on group discussion. Open questions, for which there are an almost indefinite number of responses, encourage discussion. Closed questions to which there are only one or two correct answers limit discussion. A question requiring a factual response is an example of a closed question. Reasoning questions, those that ask "why," and opinion questions, those that ask "what do you think," are examples of open questions. Using too many closed questions can be threatening to those learners who rarely get correct answers (ALBSU 1982). (See sidebar for examples of open and closed questions.)

Verbal and Nonverbal Responses. What you say and how you act can also strongly influence the group. Caring, concern, and sensitivity should be demonstrated by both your verbal and nonverbal responses. Nonverbal behavior is very easy to read and you may be conveying mixed messages if it contradicts what you are saying (Rutland and Guglielmino 1987). For example, a frown in response to an answer to an open question may convey that you are being judgmental and effectively cut off further participation in the discussion.

Coping with Silences. Silence during a group discussion should not be interpreted as negative. Periods of silence can be productive since they allow participants time to think. Silences can also provide a gap that will allow more reserved learners to enter the discussion. Or, they can be an indication that the atmosphere is comfortable. You may decide that a period of silence is unproductive or has gone on too long. In that case, you can break the silence by asking if anyone else wants to say anything, by asking a further question, or by going on to another topic (ALBSU 1982). A lengthy or uncomfortable period of silence may mean that, from the learners' perspective, the topic under discussion has sensitive aspects. As you work with learners in a group setting, you will develop the ability to interpret and respond appropriately to silences.

Handling Potential Problems. Two potential problems that may arise when working with groups are side conversations and conflict. An important ground rule for groups is that whoever is speaking deserves to have the full attention of the other learners. If you sense that two

Student groups will fight—in fact they should fight, but only in particular ways. "Substantive" conflict, conflict directed toward the work at hand and issues pertaining to it, is highly productive and should be encouraged. "Personal" conflict, conflict directed toward group members' egos, however, is damaging and unproductive. The lesson is that students need to respect each other—not so much the subject in question or the inviolability of any particular opinion about it.

(LeCourt and Miller 1992, p. 5)

or more group participants are carrying on their own conversation during the group discussion, you can simply ask for their contribution to the larger discussion. Such action will effectively bring the learners back into the discussion and also allow them to raise their points before the entire group.

It is not unusual for differences of opinion to arise during discussions; in fact, multiple perspectives are the sign of a healthy discussion. However, if these differences develop into conflicts, then you should intervene. A suggested strategy is to step in with phrases such as "Of course, there are two sides to every argument," "Well, that's one point of view," or "Would anyone disagree with that?" to allow participants time to gain perspective. Or, you may wish to call for a break in the discussion to allow for a cooling-off period. You may use the period as a time when you and the learners can talk about why the discussion has become so heated. Finally, role reversal, in which the learners take perspectives opposite their own, can also be an effective means of resolving conflicts (ALBSU 1982).

Because our students all have different experiences and cultural heritages to offer, some instructors try to create groups according to gender and ethnic diversity. That is, they try to avoid a homogeneous grouping (e.g., five white females) in order to encourage different perspectives that may come from the diverse cultures our students represent.

(LeCourt and Miller 1992, p. 5)

Dealing with Diversity. As the facilitator, it is up to you to establish a climate in which all learners feel free to participate. Some learners may be from cultures in which small group learning is not the norm or which discourage (or prohibit) speaking in mixed gender groups. Males and females may have different reactions to small groups. Because many women prefer teaching methods that are cooperative, democratic, and collaborative and permit learners to share power and authority in the teaching process (Kerka 1993), they may adapt more readily to small group learning.

In addition to learner culture and gender issues, you also need to be aware of your own reactions to learners. Do you, for example, think that some learners are at fault for what they haven't learned yet? If so, is this subconscious blaming a result of lack of respect and understanding of the students' race or class (Clarke 1991a)? Because of cultural or social conditioning do you react differently to males than to females and/or to learners who do not share your socioeconomic or cultural background?

Handling issues related to diversity requires awareness of your own and learners' cultural and social conditioning. By developing sensitivity to gender and cultural issues, you can encourage nonparticipants to join in small group learning endeavors.

Forming Groups

Before you can form small groups, you need to know **what** you want the groups to do. You can begin this process by asking yourself what kind of activities are appropriate for the learners as well as how the material can be covered effectively in small groups. These questions need to be answered before you can decide **whom** to put in which group, **when** groups should convene, and **how** groups should interact (LeCourt and Miller 1992).

When you are clear on the learning task and have decided it is appropriate for small groups, the following criteria can guide the planning of group learning activities:

- **Grouping**. You will need to decide the most effective way to group learners in order to accomplish the task. The information on types of groups, formal and informal, can help you make decisions about grouping (see next page).
- **Time**. Adequate time must be allowed to accomplish the task. If you think some groups will finish early, you should be prepared to provide activities that will extend the group work in a meaningful way.
- **Goals**. The goals may focus on the learning needs of individuals or the group or both. Ideally, small group learning tasks should help learners achieve their individual learning goals while helping them develop important skills associated with group work.
- **Roles**. Group work requires learners to assume some roles. The most common roles in small groups are those of facilitator and recorder/reporter. However, you may also wish to have someone serve as the timekeeper to help the group stay on task.
- **Setting**. As discussed previously, usually the physical space requires some rearrangement to accommodate small groups. You should be prepared

One of the advantages of working in a group is the wide range of resources and support that come from other group members. . . . But the big disadvantage from the planning point of view is precisely that diversity. . . . [The teacher] must be aware of individual differences and needs and then find ways of using a common theme to enable students to achieve their particular goals.

(ALBSU 1982, p. 8)

to instruct learners on how to prepare the room for the task.

- **Resources**. Although small group learning can take place without any special materials, sometimes materials are needed. You need to be prepared to provide the resources necessary to carry out the particular task (Tibbetts and Klein n.d.). Learners may also provide resources.

When you have established criteria for accomplishing the task, you may also find it helpful to think in terms of two types of groups: **formal** and **informal**. Formal groups have definite structure and perform complicated tasks. Considerations in forming formal groups include heterogeneous grouping of learners; carefully planned structured activities around a complicated, long-term task or situation; and elaborate presentations or feedback from groups. Cooperative learning assignments frequently require formal groups. Informal groups, on the other hand, are formed quickly to accomplish a task that arises out of a classroom learning situation such as making choices, brainstorming, completing an easy task, or discussing an issue. They can be formed rapidly by grouping learners according to where they are seated, asking students to "count off," or asking students to group themselves (Tibbetts and Klein n.d.).

Another aspect of your facilitator role is group management. Once formed, groups will need instructions related to the particular learning task. During the group work, you will need to monitor group process and be available for assistance with the task. After the group activity ends, you will need to ensure that feedback from all groups is shared. Finally, you will be responsible for evaluating both group and individual performance and encouraging improvement of both academic and cooperative skills (Tibbetts and Klein n.d.).

Formal Grouping Strategies

- Instructor forms heterogeneous groups
- Groups have well-defined structure
- Team performance receives primary recognition
- Groups are longer lasting
- Groups engage in cooperative learning

Informal Grouping Strategies

- Groups form themselves
- Groups have loosely defined structure
- Individual performance receives primary recognition
- Groups are short term
- Groups engage in activities such as peer practice, brainstorming, discussion, decision making

(Tibbetts and Klein n.d.)

We do not believe that grouping students is necessarily tied to the ability or education of the students. We try to keep students on similar levels together; but, when this is not practical or possible, we alter our teaching methods so that students of different levels can participate in the same group profitably.

(Davis and Davis 1987, p. 18)

Dos and Don'ts for Facilitating Small Groups

Do—

- include all learners who are members of the group
- make comments that show you value the contributions of each learner
- demonstrate sincere interest in what is being said and implied by assuming an attitude of active listening and integrating appropriate comments
- be alert to nonverbal communication messages and interpret them to other learners as appropriate
- encourage all learners to contribute their own ideas and knowledge
- encourage support for one another in the group by asking for suggestions to help in individual problem solving

Don't—

- allow one or two learners to monopolize the group
- overlook an unpleasant look, comment, or physical response because it is difficult for you to respond to negative behavior
- allow your attention to be diverted from the group goals and the underlying agenda by personal concerns or by focusing too much on individual (rather than group) issues
- give your opinion or personal examples to illustrate a point unless learners have been encouraged to do so first
- push a learner to contribute; instead, offer the opportunity in a nonthreatening way
- allow learners to respond in nonconstructive ways to each other; instead confront by asking the group to address negative behaviors

(Adapted from Rutland and Guglielmino 1987, pp. 6-8)

Forming Groups: A Checklist

Planning Group Activities

1. Am I clear on what learning task I want the group to accomplish?
2. Have I selected a grouping strategy that is appropriate to the nature of the task?
3. How much time is needed to accomplish the task and is sufficient time available?
4. Are some groups likely to finish the task before others and, if so, are there meaningful ways to extend the activity?
5. What is the goal of the learning activity? Is it related to the group, to the individual, or to both?
6. What measures can I use to assess the group learning effort?
7. What roles will group members need to perform to accomplish the learning task?
8. What kind of furniture arrangement does the learning task require?
9. Are any materials required for the task and, if so, will they be available?

Managing Group Activities

1. Can I give clear instructions for forming the teams as well as what is expected from the group activity (i.e., the learning task)?
2. Am I prepared to monitor groups and assist with tasks, as needed?
3. How will receiving feedback from groups be handled?
4. When and how will evaluation and assessment information be relayed to groups and/or to individuals?

3. Getting Started

The tendency for most instructors who plan to have students work in groups for the first time is to simply have students choose their own group and assign them a general task. Unfortunately, such an organization assumes the students will be familiar with working together and have experience structuring tasks. Usually, such an immediate dive-in to group work results in a belly flop that convinces the instructor that group work is messy and unproductive.

(LeCourt and Miller 1992, p. 3)

Since [we] advertised one-on-one instruction, we anticipated strong resistance to the idea of joining a group. Surprisingly, the resistance was minimal. The students accepted the idea more readily than some staff members did. We were reminded to make no assumptions, but rather to consult with the learners for accurate information.

(Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council 1992, p. 2)

Before launching into small group learning, you will need to spend time preparing learners for this approach. Although most learners will have been members of some kind of group, they may not be familiar with small groups in learning settings. Some may resist the notion of learning in small groups. For example, some may feel that by using small groups, you are abandoning your role as the authority, and others may not be familiar with how groups function.

Regardless of how you intend to integrate small groups into your learning program, all learners will benefit from some preparation for working in small groups, including performing roles associated with group membership. In addition, you and the learners can engage in some group activities designed to introduce them to fellow learners and to help them become accustomed to small group learning. By serving as the facilitator of these activities, you can provide a model for how they might work later in autonomous groups. In addition, these activities will provide opportunities for them to practice various group roles.

Preparing Learners for Small Groups

Even if you intend to use only informal groups, learners still need to be prepared for group roles as well as understand how they can contribute to group learning tasks. Common group roles include facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper. However, since other roles associated with group task and maintenance functions described on p. 17 are also important, they need to be discussed. Learners need to understand that even if they do not have an assigned role, they share equally in the responsibility for the group accomplishing its task.

Talking about the different kinds of roles and then allowing learners to role play or practice them in groups is the best way to help them understand group roles and how they contribute to group work. Putting group roles in context by asking learners to translate group roles into their daily lives is another excellent strategy for helping learners prepare to assume group roles (Tibbetts

Preparing Learners for Small Groups: A Checklist

1. Discuss and define common roles of *facilitator*, *recorder*, and *timekeeper*.
2. Ask learners to relate these roles to any of their experiences in groups.
3. Ask learners if they can think of other things that need to be done for a group to operate smoothly.
4. Ask learners if they can draw on their own experiences in groups for examples of behavior that may keep the group from accomplishing its tasks.
5. Have learners role play or practice group roles.
6. Take time to discuss the group process on an ongoing basis.

and Klein n.d.). This is a particularly effective strategy for helping learners to understand the more abstract roles associated with group task and maintenance functions. Learners can be asked to think of the people they know who always have a knack for turning a potentially angry situation into one that is more lighthearted by making a joke or saying something funny at the right time. You can tell them that such a person is performing the group maintenance function of relieving tension. They may also be able to identify the people they know who want to make sure that everyone understands what is going on, which could translate into the task function of clarifying.

You should also make learners aware of the kinds of behavior that can detract from the group accomplishing its work. Examples of this kind of behavior include the following (Tibbetts and Klein n.d.):

- Dominating the group by being the expert, hogging the discussion, or competing with others
- Distracting the group by digressing from the task, clowning, or confessing personal experiences
- Dragging the group down by putting others down, displaying negative attitudes, nitpicking, being defensive, or withdrawing

Again, learners can be helped to understand these behaviors and their possible effect on the group by relating them to their own experiences.

Learning about group membership should be ongoing. Although it is certainly advisable to introduce learners to group roles prior to beginning group work, part of group work should include examining the experience. Periodically after groups have completed their tasks, you should spend time with learners discussing what happened in the group. For example: Who took care of various group task and maintenance functions? Did anything get in the way of the group accomplishing its task?

If you establish formal, ongoing groups, you may wish to introduce the concept of "self-monitoring," in which members of the group keep track of how the group is functioning. Members can divide up monitoring tasks with one member keeping track of turn-taking, who speaks and when, and one observing nonverbal behav-

Doing a sampling of student writing was an effective way to measure growth over a specified period of time [but] it wasn't nearly as informative as the discussion of learning it evoked. Students used this occasion to discuss in great detail what they had learned in the courses and how their learning strategies had changed.

(Nash et al. 1992, p. 44)

ior. Self-monitoring groups can be encouraged to discuss any problems they see arising but to also consult with you when they can't solve problems on their own (LeCourt and Miller 1992).

Groups that are ongoing need time to become accustomed to each other. By sequencing group tasks so that members initially work together on smaller assignments, you will give group members time to learn to trust one another and become comfortable with each other's personalities, strengths, and weaknesses (ibid.).

Sample Activities for Introducing Group Work

The following activities can be used to introduce group work to learners. First are a series of icebreakers designed to provide learners an opportunity to get to know one another. Then, two other activities, "Inner Networks" and "Learning as an Adult," begin shifting the focus of small group work to the learning context.

Icebreakers

When you begin using groups, learners need an opportunity to get to know each other. Even though they may have been attending the program together over a period of time, you cannot assume that they are acquainted or that they even know each other's names. Icebreakers are exercises designed to allow learners to exchange information that will help them feel comfortable with one another as well as prepare them for working in groups. Through icebreakers, learners can exchange personal information as well as their reasons for coming to class. One way of thinking about icebreakers is as structured "small talk."

Some suggested icebreakers are included here, but from your experiences working in groups, you are probably familiar with others. Before selecting and using any icebreaker, you need to consider the following (Dahmer 1992; Gillespie 1990):

- What do you know about the backgrounds of the learners who will be participating?

- Could any of the learners fail at what they are being asked to do?
- Could the exercise create barriers instead of develop rapport?
- Could the exercise embarrass learners, particularly those who are introverted?
- Is the exercise appropriate for the learning setting and will it contribute to learners getting to know each other?
- What are the best ways to make the group comfortable?
- Can the chairs/seats be arranged in a circle?
- Could you provide refreshments?
- Could any of the learners serve as co-facilitators?

The first four icebreakers were adapted from Gillespie (1990).

Getting Acquainted. Pass around a box full of pictures that have been cut in two. You'll need the same number of pieces as there are participants (learners, teachers, volunteers). Have each participant choose a paper from the box. Then tell everyone to find a partner by matching pictures. When everyone has found a partner, explain that they will have 15 minutes to interview each other and that after the interview they will introduce their partner to the entire group. The following questions can be suggested for use during the interviews:

- What is your life like (i.e., do you have a family, are you working, and so forth)?
- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- What kinds of things do you think you do well?
- Why are you coming to ABLE classes?

When interviews have been completed, bring the group back together and have the partners introduce each other. You can conclude by mentioning that there will be additional opportunities to discuss goals and backgrounds later.

Names. Have participants discuss their names or their nicknames. Who chose their given name? Why? Is it a family tradition? If they have a nickname, how did they get it and what do they like or dislike about it.

This icebreaker may be more appropriate for use at the beginning of a series of meetings.

Hopes and Fears. Divide participants into pairs. (You can use any method, including self-selection.) Give them 15 minutes to discuss what they hope to get out of the class and their fears about coming to the ABLE

program. Come back into the large group and share hopes and fears with the group.

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. Have each participant interview a partner and find out one thing about his or her past, what she or he is doing right now, and one thing he or she hopes to do in the future. Be sure to emphasize that these responses don't have to be related to learning; they may include hobbies, work, families, and so forth. Come back into the large group and share responses.

This icebreaker is good to use when introducing small group learning to individuals who may know each other casually because they have been coming to the program together for a period of time.

Little Known Facts. In preparation for this icebreaker, collect two little known facts about each learner. Develop a list of these items, leaving a place for a signature after each group of two. Give a list to each learner and have participants circulate and interview each other to discover which "facts" match which learner. When an individual is identified and matched with a set of facts, he or she should sign the paper.

As described, this icebreaker should be used only with learners who are able to read, so you might want to develop an alternate form if you are working with non-readers or low-level readers. For example, you could ask learners to think of one little known fact about themselves and then have the group circulate and interview each other using a "20 questions" approach to elicit the fact.

Inner Networks

Originally developed by Hanna Fingeret and adapted from Gillespie (1990), this exercise is designed to help learners think about how close friends and family influence their learning. It also places small group work in the learning context. An inner network is defined as those persons closest to the learner. It could include spouse, children, neighbors, parents, and so on. The exercise asks learners to depict that network, to think of how the members help one another, and to imagine how those relationships might change if they were to become more independent in their ability to read and write.

1. Learners begin by placing an X in the middle of a piece of paper and then drawing a circle around the X.

For each member of their "inner network," they place an X on the circle and, if appropriate, the name of the person represented by the X. Most learners will probably have a small number of Xs.

2. Ask learners to think back to some fairly major changes in their lives during the past few years that have required learning new skills and using new knowledge. These could include becoming a parent, taking a new job or facing changes in current job, getting married, or moving. Ask them to take another piece of paper and chart their inner network before this change took place.

3. Have learners break into small groups of three or four. In the groups have them discuss how they moved from the relationships on the chart depicting their inner network before the change took place to their current inner network. Suggested questions include—

- How did the change come about?
- How did you feel about it?
- What kinds of skills did you use in making the change?
- How did the members of your inner network respond?

4. Next, ask the groups to think about someone in their previous or current inner network who has undergone some major change. Suggested questions for discussion include—

- How has that change affected you?
- How did you feel about the change when it occurred?
- How do you feel about the change now?

5. Next, ask groups to consider how current learning efforts are affecting (or might affect) their inner networks. Suggested questions for discussion include—

- Who in their inner network helps them with reading and writing now?
- As the learner becomes a better reader, could that person continue to help?
- Who else might be affected as they improve their abilities to read and write?

- In what ways might improving their abilities to read and write influence the relationships in their inner networks?
- In what ways might members of their inner networks encourage or discourage participation in the ABLE program?

6. Reconvene the large group and ask each group to summarize its discussion. Help the groups to chart some of the common responses. Ask the group to evaluate this activity and the group process. Some suggested questions are—

- What did they learn?
- Can they recommend any other follow-up activities?
- Did anyone talk more than the others?
- Was anyone very quiet?
- Did anyone assume a role as a leader, a recorder, or a summarizer?
- Can they think of ways that they might like to change how they operate in a group?

Learning as an Adult

Designed to help learners understand why it is important to participate actively in their own learning, this activity has also been adapted from Gillespie (1990). It is designed to help learners understand that they can draw on their previous experience as a source for learning. It also helps set the stage for future discussions of individual learning strategies. A major advantage of the small group learning approach is that it offers an opportunity to share learning strategies, sometimes referred to as metacognition.

1. Write the word **EXPERT** on the board or on a flip chart. Ask the group to define the word. Then ask them to name people they consider to be experts.

2. Point out that even though they might not have been in school since they were young, they haven't stopped learning. Describe some of the things people learn that do not require reading and writing. You might encourage the learners to participate in the discussion by asking them for examples.

3. Ask learners to find a partner and to describe something they taught themselves. (Examples include repairing a car, cooking a new dish, learning to dance, learning a new job, and so forth.) Ask them to discuss the following questions:

- How did they learn it?
- Who or what helped?
- How did they get the information they needed?
- Were there any problems they had to solve?
- How did they combine what they already knew with new information?

4. Reassemble as a large group and discuss the different ways of learning reflected in the experiences of the participants. Some examples include—

- Listening to a teacher
- Watching an expert
- Listening to television, radio, or music
- Making mistakes (i.e., trial and error)
- Following instructions (written or oral)
- Using their imagination

5. Ask the group to list some of the conditions that made it easy or difficult to learn. Which of the ones listed do learners feel are most important?

6. Ask the group to think about the difference between what they learned on their own and something they learned from a teacher. Which method of learning was more effective and why?

7. At the conclusion, ask learners to evaluate the activity. Suggested questions include the following:

- Do they feel that it contributed to their understanding of how they learn?
- Can they suggest follow-up activities?
- Would they like to participate in additional group activities that explore how they learn?
- Did anyone talk more than the others?
- Was anyone very quiet?
- Did anyone assume a role as a leader, a recorder, or a summarizer?
- Can they think of ways that they might like to change how they operate in a group?

4. Learning Activities

Because it represents a departure from current practice in most ABLE programs, the time and effort involved in generating appropriate learning activities is frequently named as a major disadvantage to the small group learning approach. Implemented properly, the approach demands creativity and thought from teachers that predetermined curriculum materials do not (Clarke 1991a). However, just as you think of the process of using the small group approach as being on a continuum, you can also think of developing learning activities as a part of that continuum. You may decide that you wish to use small groups only occasionally so that your work in developing learning activities will be minimal. On the other hand, you may decide that you are going to adopt the small group learning approach exclusively and use learner-centered curricula. If that is your decision, you may wish to involve learners in generating learning materials, a process that is described in Chapter 6.

This chapter covers approaches that you can use to develop learning activities for small groups, regardless of whether you intend to use small groups occasionally or exclusively. It also includes some examples of activities that you can use or adapt for your learners. Additional activities are available from the resources listed in Appendix A.

Generating Ideas

Ideas for learning activities can come from you, individual learners, or the entire group. This section suggests some areas that can form the basis for generating learning activities and makes suggestions for how you might elicit ideas.

Learning activities may be based on the following:

- **Current interest**. Current topics are frequently excellent sources for small group learning activities. Some examples of current interest topics are local events, local and national news items, politics, and movies.
- **General interest.** Learners share common experiences and these can form the basis for working in

Know your audience when selecting a topic. For example, would your group be more interested in the World Trade Center bombing or the David Koresh/Waco stand-off?

(Charley Flaig, focus group participant, March 25, 1993)

Generating Ideas for Group Work

- What are the learners interested in?
- What do the learners generally talk about?
- What experiences do the learners have in common?
- Is there a task that all the learners need to do?
- Do the learners share common learning needs?

(ALBSU 1982)

small groups. Topics that may be of general interest to learners include housing, money, sports, previous school experiences, hobbies, and child rearing.

- **Functional tasks**. Most learners have tasks that they need to learn to perform. Examples of functional tasks include filling out forms (e.g., job applications, census forms), writing letters, and interpreting graphs and tables.
- **Skills**. All learners are enrolled in ABLE programs in order to improve their basic skills. Small group learning activities can be developed around such skills as spelling, writing, reading, computation, problem solving, and decision making (ALBSU 1982).

Listening is one of the best ways of getting ideas for learning activities. What kinds of questions are learners asking? What kinds of things are they talking about? As the facilitator, you can provide mechanisms to help you listen and to provide you opportunities to listen. For example, you might have breaks during sessions in which you and the learners interact informally or you might brainstorm as a group. You need to listen with both your ears and eyes. You might visit learners' neighborhoods or workplaces or ask learners to bring in photos of their homes or work setting. You and the learners can use the photos to identify themes or topics for group work (Clarke 1991a).

By listening to the learners, you can build on their strengths by developing learning activities around what they already know. Activities that focus on their needs are more likely to engage them in the learning process and enable them to accomplish something they want to accomplish (Auerbach 1992).

Regardless of your starting point for ideas for learning activities, you should—

- look for issues that learners will see worth discussing
- remember learners' desires to improve their basic skills
- be prepared to change direction when learners tire of a topic

- be prepared for the possibility that strong feelings may be expressed when dealing with a controversial topic
- keep ideas from one group for possible use with others

(ALBSU 1982)

Developing Activities

Once you decide to begin using small groups, you may think of ways that you can adopt or adapt your current learning materials for use with groups. The following questions can help guide the decisions on learning activities:

- What do you want to accomplish with a particular learning task?
- Is a small group an effective method of covering the material?
- Can existing learning material be adapted or adopted, and if so, how?
- What sources are available for generating materials?

Because most learners come to ABLE programs to develop discrete skills, you will probably want to develop some learning activities around skill building. Learning activities that require learners to practice multiple skills are richer because they tend to replicate how skills are used in "real" life. Therefore, when developing learning activities for small groups, you should think about the links between or among various skills (e.g., talking and reading, talking and writing).

When groups are working well, a lot of time is spent talking. Talking can be an important step in developing learners' desire to acquire skills.

Talking in a group—

- begins with existing strengths and skills
- uses learners' working knowledge and rules of language
- draws on the vocabulary learners possess
- develops learners' confidence

In group work designed to develop reading skills, talking can—

- make reading more purposeful
- help learners understand and interpret text
- help learners develop a critical approach to print
- arouse interest in a subject

Likewise, in group work designed to develop writing skills, talking can—

- create a reason for writing
- help clarify thinking about what to write
- help to order thoughts
- provide an audience for writing
- help in making decisions about language, style, and tone

(ALBSU 1982)

Socializing, joking around, or telling stories are a natural part of group interaction and should be encouraged. It is primarily through "goofing off" that group members learn about each other's personalities, communication styles, and senses of humor. Such knowledge builds trust and community among the members.

(LeCourt and Miller 1992, pp. 5-6)

Because talking is so important, you need to ensure that it is part of all group activities and allow time for it to occur. Most groups will probably spend some time talking about topics other than the work at hand. Don't consider this time wasted unless the group fails even to get down to business. By making questions a part of group learning activities, you can provide a basis for talking and also help "guide" the talking in ways that will help accomplish the learning task.

A suggested model for integrating the small group learning approach into programs focused primarily on skill development is as follows:

Example: Capitalization

Step 1: Ask learners to tell everything they know about capitalization. For example, ask what rules they follow in deciding to capitalize a word or how they decide that a word should be capitalized. Record answers on the board or a flip chart.

Step 2: Photocopy an example of writing (such as a letter) onto an overhead transparency. The writing example should contain both correct and incorrect examples of capitalization. Go through the example and narrate how rules for capitalization have been or should be applied, including those given by learners.

Step 3: Have learners divide into pairs and write a sentence example on the board. Have one pair of learners at the board. Ask learners at the board to underline all capitals as well as possible capital letters and explain the rules that fit. Learners in seats can assist and eventually all pairs should take turns at the board.

Step 4: Have learners work in pairs or groups of three to invent example sentences to be used by class for capitalization practice. Put sentences on board and have groups work on them. Assign those learners who are able to use capitals with ease to help those having difficulty.

Step 1. Introduce the skill by explaining what you will be teaching and how it is needed or used. You can ask the learners to contribute what they already know about the skill, posting their contributions in writing.

Step 2. Model by showing the learners how the skill is used, giving them an opportunity to watch you perform the skill. Narrate your actions with a running commentary explaining what you are doing and why. This will give them insight into your approach.

Step 3. Teach the skill directly to the learners. You can accomplish this step in a number of different ways. For example, you can have them look at correct and incorrect examples and have them guess the rules to follow to obtain the correct results. You can use pages from workbooks. You can walk them through the steps, perhaps with one or two learners at the board. You may use a combination of strategies to teach the skill. How you choose to do this will probably be determined by your teaching style, the learners' preferences, and the available learning materials.

Step 4. Use small groups to provide an opportunity for guided practice. Although repeated drill can be deadly, real learning occurs through sufficient practice. First, ensure that there is little opportunity to make errors. You may begin guided practice in the large group under your direction, moving to small groups for which you provide support through your presence. During small group learning, learners can work together and then independently. If you have arranged the small groups so that members have varying ability levels, those with higher skill levels can assist those who need more practice. Working in small groups can provide the opportunity for learners to discover ways to approach

the skill other than the one(s) demonstrated by you.

Step 5: Distribute photocopies of an original page of writing and have each learner individually proofread for capitalization. Circulate to assist learners needing help.

Step 5. Learners need an opportunity to practice the new skill independently with very little assistance. You can accomplish this by providing worksheets or asking them to respond to questions orally. During this step, learners are gaining confidence in their ability to perform the new skill and you are checking to see if they are ready for the next step. If you find that learners are not able to use the skill independently, return to step three, using a different approach to reteach the skill. You can involve the learners by asking them what they think about the skill and how to use it. Knowing what they think can help you explain how they can avoid errors.

Step 6: Ask learners to proofread their own work.

Step 6. Learners should now be asked to apply the skill to an actual situation. Again, you can use groups for this application. In this step, you should remain in the background and allow the learners to use the skill independent of your guidance.

(Adapted from Clarke 1991a)

Sample Learning Activities

Several sample learning activities that can be used in small group learning are included here. You can modify or adapt these activities to fit the needs of your learners. They may also serve as a stimulus for the development of additional small group learning activities.

Skill Development through Reflections on Work (Adapted from Pelz and Clarke 1991).

Purpose:

This activity draws on learners' work experiences to improve writing skills. Through discussion, they also engage in decision making and problem solving.

Time:

60-90 minutes for steps 1-7; 60 minutes for step 8, which may be completed during a separate session.

Materials:

A flip chart or chalk board and paper and pencils for learners.

Procedure:

1. Divide the learners into groups of four or five. If you have six or fewer learners, you can have one group.

2. Learners begin by making a list of all the different kinds of work—both paid and unpaid—that they have done. You can help them by suggesting such activities as child care, house cleaning, fixing cars, gardening, and so forth. Have dictionaries available for help with spelling. You may also encourage them to help each other.

3. Have them read their lists aloud to the other members of their group. You can make yourself available for assistance as needed.

4. Next, have them discuss their experiences with work by telling stories about a boss, about how they got a job, or about how they decided how they are going to perform their work.

5. Following the discussion, learners should pick out one job from their list that they liked and/or did well, and write why they liked the work. Have them do the same for a job that they did not like. Again, they can use dictionaries for help with spelling or assist each other.

6. Have each group compile a list of reasons for liking their work and a list of reasons for disliking their work. Someone will need to serve as recorder.

7. Have the groups share their lists. As they give their lists, you can write the reasons on the board.

8. With the large group, lead a discussion using the following questions:

   - What kinds of work or jobs are good and why?
   - What kinds of jobs or work are unpleasant and why?
   - Who usually gets good jobs?
   - Who usually gets the bad ones?

This step can be done as a separate session. You can keep the lists of reasons for liking and not liking jobs and report them for this part of the activity.

9. Have learners get into their small groups and ask them to imagine the following:

   A young person they know is thinking of applying for a job that they used to have and didn't like. They are to write a letter to that person and give him or her advice. Should the person take the job? If so, what should he or she watch out for, do, or avoid doing? If some time has elapsed since they completed steps 1 through 7, review the lists of reasons for liking and not liking jobs. Encourage them to talk with each other before they begin writing. Each will need to have a specific young person and a specific job in mind. Have a model letter on the board that includes the date, salutation, body, and ending salutation. Encourage learners to help each other; when they are finished, they can read their letters to members of their group. You can collect their letters following the completion of the activity.

This activity could be adapted for use in math for learning formulas or processes; it could also be used in matching exercises.

Constructing Sentences from Single Words (Adapted from Perkins 1993.)

Purpose:

Designed to introduce learners to writing in groups, this activity focuses on sentence construction. Three to five learners work together to unscramble sentences. The activity helps learners understand that they know how parts of speech work, even if they do not know the names.

Time:

30 minutes

Materials:

One set of identical 3 x 5 note cards for each group; the number depends on the size of the class. Each card contains one word without capitals or punctuation. For the exercise to work, it is essential that there be only five possible correct sentences. Suggested sentences are—

Spring is here.
The dogs have begun barking.
The cat dashed into the house.
I'm eager to start reading.
The sunlight blinded me.

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into small groups of three to five learners and give each group a set of 3 x 5 note cards.

2. Ask the groups to unscramble the cards and lay them out as separate sentences.

3. Have groups take turns reading their sentences.

4. Conclude by discussing how learners knew which words had to go into which sentences. Emphasize that they can use this information in developing their own sentences (writing).

Multi-Text Reading Approach (Adapted from Boraks 1989)

Purpose:

The multi-text reading approach is a motivating instructional strategy for teaching reading to a diverse group of adults. It builds upon differences in backgrounds and provides opportunity for distinguishing reading demands within a whole class lesson.

Time:

All steps can be completed in one lesson or one or two steps can be addressed in each session.

Materials:

Books and other print information on the topic selected for the lesson.

Preparation:

Prior to the lesson, a topic needs to be selected. Regardless of how the topic is selected (e.g., by the learners, by the teacher, or jointly), it should be based on learner needs and interests. A variety of reading materials that contain information on the topic should be gathered and made available during the lesson. Sources of materials include the library and the learners themselves. Having available multiple texts of varying degrees of difficulty to match the conceptual levels of learners is the essential part of this strategy.

Procedure:

1. Establish what the learners want to know about the topic by asking what questions they have about it or what questions they think the materials will answer. Write each question on the board or flip chart. The number of questions may need to be adjusted to the amount of available time.

2. Establish what the learners already know about the topic by referring back to each question and having learners predict answers. Get as many predictions as possible and accept all the predictions. Write the predictions under each question. Greater variation in responses can generate interest in finding the answer.

3. Solicit commitment from the learners by having them select the answer they think is most likely. It is important that all learners participate in this step. Although some adults are reluctant to participate initially, they are usually willing to go along with a peer's response.

4. Divide learners into groups of three or four. Groups can be responsible for answering all the questions or questions can be divided among the groups. Friendly competition can develop if more than one group is looking for the answer to each question.

5. Learners select a book and scan it to locate answers. It is important for learners to select their own books but they may need some inconspicuous guidance to choose one that is appropriate. Some learners may find answers through scanning pictures, captions, and charts but others will read more closely. If needed, instruction in using a table of contents, skimming, scanning, reading pictures and graphics, or types of text organization can be provided as a part of this step.

6. Once learners have found the answers to the questions, they should discuss them as a part of the large group, including any differences. Have the entire group discuss why they may have found different answers. Also, ask how the small groups arrived at and/or decided on the correct answer. Learners probably will not find the answer to every question in their books. Ways to locate answers to these questions can be discussed (e.g., consult local experts or encyclopedias).

7. Now learners should carefully read the entire book or selected portions to determine what else the author has to say about the topic. Ask learners to think about the following questions:

   - What are the book's main points?
   - What is the author's attitude toward the topic?
   - What structure is used to present the information?

8. Have learners reassemble into small groups to share information learned from rereading and critique how the information was presented. The following questions can guide their discussions:

   - What do different authors believe is the most important information?
   - What information do the learners want to recall or remember?
   - How would they want to organize this information?

   After the discussion, learners should write a brief passage summarizing what they have learned about the topic and share the information with the

members of the group. Beginning readers may need to dictate their passages.

9. Have learners evaluate the activity by listing signs of progress. Learners may tend to see progress in terms of concrete numbers, i.e., number of words learned, number of pages read, number of answers found, and so forth. Instructors should respect these views but encourage learners to think more broadly by adding less quantitative things like kinds of questions asked and attitude displayed.

Numbers in Our Lives (Adapted from Goddard, Marr, and Martin 1991)

Purpose:

This activity is designed to enable learners to talk about numbers in a nonthreatening and interesting way. It develops group skills, practice with numerical language, and practice with representing numerical information pictorially.

Time:

1-2 hours; activity could be split into two sessions with one session devoted to "gathering" the information and the second to pictorial representation.

Materials:

Learners need paper on which to collect information; flip chart or chalk board for recording questions.

Procedure:

1. Ask each learner to develop a question that would be answered by a number. The following questions can be used as examples to stimulate the thinking:

   - How many times a year do you go to a movie?
   - How many times a year do you rent a video?
   - How many people live in your house/apartment?
   - How many cups of coffee/sodas do you drink every day?

2. Form groups of 3 to 5 learners, and within the group, have the learners ask their questions and others answer with discussion following each question.

3. Ask each group to select two questions for recording on the board. From this list, select those that could lead into a discussion of estimation (e.g., How many times a year do you go to see a movie?). Have a discussion with the group about estimation, including how they arrive at estimated answers. Ask learners to share their approaches for arriving at answers as a means of developing awareness of cognitive strategies.

4. Next, use some of the questions to introduce graphs and tables. Ask the learners to imagine how their information could be represented pictorially. Have them work in small groups to develop a table or a graph representing responses to one of the questions.

How Does Math Figure in Your Life (Adapted from Goddard, Marr, and Martin 1991).

Purpose:

This activity encourages learners to look at how much mathematics arises in their daily lives, including whether they have the skills to cope with it. This activity can help identify numeracy learning needs.

Time:

1 hour

Materials:

Flip chart or board for recording group responses; paper for recorder to use to record group answers.

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into groups of 3 to 5 learners. Ask the groups to discuss what mathematics they have used in the last week. The discussion can be stimulated by such questions as—

- Did you go shopping? What did you buy? How did you decide what you needed?
- Have you withdrawn money from the bank this week? How did you decide what you needed?

Have the group appoint a recorder to develop a list of ways they have used math. Group members can assist the recorder.

2. Reconvene the groups and have groups take turns in reporting their responses. It is best to handle this reporting by asking each recorder to give one response at a time, allowing every group to have a turn before going around again. This strategy allows all groups to participate since there is likely to be duplication among the lists. As you record the responses, encourage discussion about the math or numeracy-related skills that they might have used in completing the task. During the discussion, it may become apparent that a lot of the calculations involved in daily tasks are things which the learners—depending on their skill levels—"do in their heads." Have learners share their strategies for accomplishing the math required for daily tasks. Talk about the importance of estimating in making these daily life calculations.

3. As a follow-up activity, ask learners to make a list of those tasks they need to accomplish that require math and bring it to the next session. Have them indicate whether they can accomplish the task or if they need to work on further skill development. Use these lists as a means of setting goals or developing future learning activities.

5. Developing Learner-Generated Materials

The previous sections demonstrate the value of moving away from the traditional teacher-directed classroom to a learner-directed environment that is collaborative, cooperative, and participatory. The benefits of learners controlling their own learning through small group involvement may convince teachers to shift their role to facilitating instruction. Yet teachers/facilitators are usually responsible for developing the learning materials to be used. It is a common conception about learning in formal situations that the curriculum and related materials should be predesigned, predeveloped, and preproduced. And, as has been noted earlier, the time and effort involved in generating appropriate learning activities is often cited as a major disadvantage to a small group learning approach.

This chapter explains—

- the benefits of having learners participate in developing materials
- how teachers can become co-developers with learners
- some techniques for beginning the process of learner-generated material development

What Materials and Why?

Curriculum materials are usually thought of as textbooks, workbooks, teaching-oriented software, and audiovisual materials that are predesigned for and used in classrooms. They tend to have some disadvantages:

- Quickly obsolete
- Difficult to change
- Expensive to purchase
- Time consuming to develop
- Lacking specificity for learner needs
- Artificial rather than real

The most important drawback may be that those who learn from their development are the curriculum developers, not the intended learners.

Educational materials are the "stuff" of learning. Learners can learn much more about both learning itself **and** the content if they can be involved in generating the materials themselves. Interestingly, by involving the learners in generating materials, most of the other liabilities either disappear or are lessened. The focus shifts from **products** to a **process** that is an integral part of learning as it is "discovered" by learners.

A learner-centered curriculum teaches skills needed in today's workplace.

What is it about this development process that would be beneficial for most learners? First, teaching is not simply the task of educators: teaching is an activity that is now being asked of people at all levels and in all types of jobs/roles in organizations. For example, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (1991) specifically included under the heading of competencies needed in the workplace teaching others new skills.

In a competitive and dynamic world, the most effective organizations, such as workplaces, are "learning organizations."

Recurrent throughout the school-to-work transition research are the findings that our graduates need to be able to—

- *think both critically and creatively*
- *deal with multiple approaches and answers and ambiguity in general*
- *communicate in writing and orally*
- *locate and use information to solve problems in the workplace*
- *be flexible, cooperative, and responsive to divergent suggestions and thought.*

These research findings are instrumental as a foundation for planning curriculum—curriculum capable of producing effective problem solvers and decision makers on the job.

(Foran et al. 1992, p. 7)

Learning Organizations

What is a learning organization?

> An organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Garvin 1993, p. 80)

What are some of its characteristics?

- Systematic problem solving
- Experimentation with new approaches
- Learning from one's own experience
- Learning from the experiences of others
- Transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization

(Garvin 1993)

Why would you want to be in one?

> Learning organizations are places "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together"
>
> (Senge 1990, p. 1).

People will function better in such situations if they are not dependent on others to generate the stuff of their learning.

A learner-centered curriculum enhances motivation.

A learner-centered curriculum, based on learners' self-selected needs, is widely believed to enhance motivation. The age-old question, "Why do I need to know this, teacher?" does not disappear with adulthood, nor does the need to find relevance in learning. It is logical to follow through on those needs by assisting learners in exploring for themselves what it takes to meet them.

Furthermore, new knowledge must connect to learners' existing knowledge to be retained. The learners' previous experiences are unique and must be built upon for them to learn best.

Cognitive scientists studying learning have revealed much about how the brain extracts meaning, and their findings favor a participatory method over traditional instruction. In this mode, immersion in a learning experience allow learners to use their many types of intelligences to process and organize the information for themselves. The brain's function in this process can be portrayed this way:

Learning that requires too much memorization and drill (using taxon memory) is less efficient than learning that uses interconnected ideas, concepts, and environment (using locale memory). Thus, "whole" learning experiences are more likely to make an impact on learners.

The Brain's Memory Systems

The taxon	The locale
Function: Stores and recalls *isolated* bits of information	Function: Makes maps and complex routes between bits (*interconnected* bits)
Educational role: Resource for rote memory and drill	Educational role: Recording whole experiences including emotions, actions, impact, environment
Efficiency rating for learning: low	Efficiency rating for learning: high

(Adapted from Foran et al. 1992, pp. 9-10)

A learner-centered curriculum respects learners as competent adults.

An integral part of participatory education is the process of curriculum development. Curriculum development does not take place in a vacuum. It does not take place before the semester begins. It is not determined by a textbook. Curriculum development is ongoing and involves the students. They are the ones with the knowledge of the important issues in their lives. It is the role of the teacher to help students make these issues explicit and then to incorporate them into materials appropriate for classroom use.

In an atmosphere of open communication, students and teachers learn from each other, exchange ideas and concerns, and share responsibility for how classes are going. As students enter into the process of shaping the class agenda, they take on a more equal part in decision-making and begin to redefine traditional student/teacher roles. Decisions that were once the domain of the teacher become open to negotiation—decisions such as how curriculum content is determined, what languages are spoken in the classroom and when, how to set and enforce class ground rules, and how far to carry a sensitive issue or difficult subject.

(Nash et al. 1992, p. 2)

Another reason to involve learners in generating their own curriculum is that it accords them the full dignity and respect they deserve as adults. Learners bring to the educational situation a great deal of knowledge from their work, family, and daily lives. They may not recognize themselves how valuable a resource this is. When a teacher demonstrates confidence that learners will be able to draw meaning from this resource, learners' self-esteem is enhanced. If their materials are to be shared with others in their group, and perhaps beyond, other positive effects spin off. As learners develop materials that are "produced" in some way—word processed, duplicated, and presented for others to learn from—they cannot help but feel a sense of importance that their efforts are valued. This, in turn, tends to have the beneficial effect of raising their standards for their own work. The knowledge that their materials are to be used to help others learn is likely to provide far more

internal motivation than could possibly be imposed externally by a teacher.

How?

You may, as a teacher with your own high standards, be worrying at this point. There is no question that developing curriculum materials is a demanding pursuit requiring its own set of skills that are not easy to acquire. That is where your role as a teacher/facilitator comes in. Rather than being responsible for developing materials yourself, you become the catalyst for drawing them out of the learners and providing guidance and a resource-rich environment in which materials can be developed. This role is no less demanding than the other, but it requires some different skills. Clarke (1991a) describes these skills as follows:

> It might be the ability to draw out of individuals a collective perception of reality that can be analyzed and acted upon. It might be experience in facilitating separate individuals to forge a learning community. What good teachers offer certainly isn't 'the answers' or 'a better way to live.' What they do offer, each decides for him or herself by determining the needs of the current students. (pp. 2-3)

We take care not to create what Nan Elsasser (a popular educator from New Mexico) calls "teacher junkies," students who have been made dependent on the direction of a teacher. Our classes are only brief moments in a person's total life. We had best facilitate independence as quickly as we know how. In practice, this means looking at your every function in the classroom and thinking of ways to teach that skill to the students: proofreader, book finder and chooser, materials organizer, evaluator, chaos controller, or discussion facilitator, for example.

(Clarke 1991a, p. 11)

We see the relationship between teacher and students a little differently from more traditional programs. In our role as teachers, we like to think of students as co-conspirators. If I am struggling to create good lesson plans, but they don't seem to be working, it's probably because I'm taking on too much myself and not sharing it adequately with the students. Whatever can be done by students ought to be. Whatever they don't feel ready to do becomes the next lesson. The students are co-teachers.

(Clarke 1991a, p. 11)

Teacher as Co-developer with Learners

Your roles:

Leader	Coordinator	Role model
Coach	Mentor	Facilitator
	Information source	

Your central question:

What can I do to promote learning?
(to be asked as you prepare; to be asked continually throughout the course of instruction)

Your response demands—

- constant flexibility
- careful listening
- alertness
- creativity
- confidence in your ability to recognize and capture the "stuff" of learning as it emerges in interacting with learners
- good judgment to sift and sort among possibilities to form a learning path to a seen destination (not necessarily a straight and narrow path!)

Your curriculum:

the learning experience (process) of developing materials (products)

You may not have been trained or had practice in all that is required in this conception of a teacher and lead developer. Therefore, you may not feel comfortable right away. You may be used to using a set method and a prepared sequence of activities. You will need to allow yourself to experiment, to try out techniques and procedures, and to evaluate their effectiveness as you proceed. Following are some ways that others have found helpful.

Questioning

Through effective questioning, you can open up and maintain a dialogue. "**What**" questions (What do you think; what do you do when . . ., and so forth) are open ended and encourage participation; they also imply that the listener has something to contribute.

This type of question can evolve to brainstorming—fostering the involvement of all in suggesting creative thoughts. Some ground rules for brainstorming should be established by the group to ensure that a positive environment is maintained. Questions that elicit good thinking can be thought of along the levels of the Bloom Taxonomy of Learning, as suggested by the Language and Learning Improvement Branch of the Division of Instruction, Maryland State Department of Education (n.d.):

By following the questioning process using the taxonomy on the next page, you can facilitate systematic problem solving with the group as follows:

- **Knowledge.** Set the stage by finding out what the group already knows about the problem.
- **Comprehension.** Guide the group to organize what they know so that it is usable and so they can identify what else is needed.
- **Application.** Help the group test the significance of their information to the problem at hand.
- **Analysis.** Encourage the learners to study the information in detail so as to see parts and relationships.
- **Synthesis.** Work with the group to build creatively on what they have.
- **Evaluation.** Find out if the problem is solved or the goal reached: How does the group know?

Knowledge. Identification and recall of information.
Who, what, when, where, how _____?
Describe _____.

Comprehension. Organization and selection of facts and ideas.
Retell _____ in your own words. What is the main idea of _____?

Application. Use of facts, rules, principles.
How is _____ an example of _____?
How is _____ related to _____?
Why is _____ significant?

Analysis. Separation of a whole into component parts.
What are the parts or features of _____?
Classify _____ according to _____.
Outline/diagram/web _____.
How does _____ compare/contrast with _____?
What evidence can you present for _____?

Synthesis. Combination of ideas to form a new whole.
What would you predict/infer from _____?
What ideas can you add to _____?
How would you create/design a new _____?
What might happen if you combined _____ with _____?
What solutions would you suggest for _____?

Evaluation. Development of opinions, judgments, or decisions.
Do you agree _____?
What do you think about _____?
What is the most important _____?
Prioritize _____ according to _____.
How would you decide about _____?
What criteria would you use to assess _____?

Role Modeling

Role modeling and articulating your own approach to learning and problem solving are important. This perception is often almost subconscious and needs to be made conscious and explicit. Talk through your own thoughts as you work through a situation, almost as though you were outside yourself, narrating a videotape of your own thinking process.

Finding Student Themes

1. Create a setting

   Use the context in which you meet students as a starting point for conversation:

   - Workplace—safety signs
   - Parent group—family pictures
   - Community—local newspaper story

2. Listen actively for issues, problems, ideas to pursue

   - Conversations before, during, and after class
   - Were you looking forward to coming to class today? Was it hard to come to class today? Why?

3. Elicit issues and concerns

   - Writing or responding—
     "It is a struggle to . . ."
     "I'd like to . . ."
     "I don't know how to . . ."
     "One of my strengths is . . ."

   - Class activities—
     Accomplishments
     Ways to approach a task

   - Student research
     Investigation to find needed information at home, at work, or in the community

(Adapted from Auerbach 1992, pp. 43-44)

Identifying Goals and Themes

Goals for learning are the articulation of the desired outcomes and are the practical answer to the question "What for?" They provide a motivational focus. **Themes** are the articulation of how the commonly expressed needs of learners can be generalized and grouped for instruction. Themes also provide a focus for the learning activities.

You are indispensable in creating the environment in which issues and needs can emerge from the small group. Your inquiries and role modeling help to set the tone. But a critical element is your active listening, helping to round out gaps in the discussion, and following up on a line of dialogue that allows for the related strands to be gathered into an integrated theme statement for consideration by the group.

Getting Started

With a commitment to the philosophy and a repertoire of skills at the ready, how can you proceed to lead learners to generate materials? You want to capitalize on the possibilities offered by working with learners in small groups as well as to respond to individual needs and incorporate large group work as it will be helpful. This means that the fact that the small group thinks of itself as a group and shares a common purpose can be an asset.

If a goal or theme has been chosen through dialogue, you know from listening to the discussion what needs have surfaced. Guide the group to establish specific objectives related to the goal or theme through a consensus process. You can use this opportunity to teach a mini-lesson on objectives (what they should contain, why they are important, and so forth).

A general exploration of what the learners already know about this topic is important, both as a guide in planning an approach and as a way of making apparent that the learners already have some knowledge to build on. In selecting an approach, consider the characteristics of learning organizations:

Examples of Graphic Organizers

Mapping. Sometimes called clustering, mapping helps people to find links between many different ideas. Usually a writer starts with one topic in the middle of the page. Then topics that "spin off" of the first topic are written in a circle around the first topic.

Problem Tree. A problem tree starts with one problem or question. An answer is written down as one branch of the tree. If that answer leads to another question, you continue up that branch of the tree until you have exhausted all the "why" questions you can think of. Then, you can go back to the root of the tree again and find another reason why "X" is a problem and continue to fill in the branches.

(Gillespie 1990, p. 107)

Sample DACUM Profile for Machinist Tasks with Supporting Basic Skills

DUTY A. Set Up Hand Held Machines and Automatics

Task A-1. Get job information from supervisor or dispatcher
- Receive written information
- Receive oral information
- Recognize tool and material requirements
- Interpret blueprints

Task A-2. Consult blueprint for specs
- Read route cards
- Interpret directions from supervisor
- Read notes on blueprints
- Read dimensions
- Change fractions to decimals
- Add, subtract, divide, and multiply
- Use fractions and decimals
- Read decimals to 1/10,000ths of an inch

(Excerpted from "DACUM Connections" 1993)

- Systematic problem solving
- Experimentation
- Learning from experience
- Transferring knowledge

Following are some suggested approaches:

Map the Topic

Help the group analyze the topic to establish a conceptual framework that is simple and straightforward, is in their own terms, and has some concrete physical manifestation. A variety of types of graphic organizers can be used as tools (e.g., mind maps, venn diagrams, sequence chains, comparison tables).

A process widely used for job analysis can be adapted for other topics: the DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) process relies on small group brainstorming to reach consensus. When a job is analyzed, the group reviews it systematically to identify the specific tasks performed, along with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for them. A related process, DELTA (DACUM Enhanced Literacy Task Analysis), adds the specific communication, computation, and problem-solving skills inherent in each task. The outcome is a profile chart giving a detailed portrayal of the job, in terms of both job tasks and their academic foundations. (See the box at left for an example.)

The DACUM process is in itself a learning experience in phased analysis, so it can be used with any topic that can be sequentially analyzed to a finer and finer level. It also helps learners realize that they have the ability to reflect on their own situation and knowledge. The product, the chart, is a form of curriculum. Learners can review it to identify where they want to give priority attention for learning, either individually or in pairs or groups.

Solve Problems

One of the most common reasons people want to learn is that they face decisions and problems daily in the multiple roles of their lives. If learners identify some of the decision points and problems inherent in their real

Xerox's Problem-Solving Process

Problem solving at Xerox involves six steps:

1. Identifying and selecting problem
2. Analyzing problem
3. Generating potential solutions
4. Selecting and planning the solution
5. Implementing the solution
6. Evaluating the solution

Each step undergoes a process of expansion/ divergence, then contraction/convergence, and finally determination of what is needed to go to the next step. For example: *Step 2. Analyzing problem* is expanded by identifying many potential causes, then contracted as the key cause(s) are determined; finally, the key cause(s) are documented and ranked in preparation for Step 3.

(Adapted from Garvin 1993)

A Workplace Scenario

"There are things I want to say and do, but I don't feel that I can." Jerry's words, sometimes stuttered, reflect insecurity and lack of confidence, especially in his oral communication skills. Jerry's supervisor in the automotive plant sees him as a good and dependable worker who keeps to himself in a shell of shyness. As in many manufacturing companies, the work unit has converted to a teamwork mode of operation, and Jerry is not able to contribute, nor does he volunteer to take a turn at leading the group meetings. Supervisors are being asked to assess evidence of teamwork as a criterion for job evaluation. Now Jerry and a team of coworkers have been asked to give a presentation to some visitors from headquarters on the steps they take to improve quality and reduce damaged parts.

situations related to the chosen topic, they have a practical and immediate application for their learning. This motivating factor is underscored by the benefit of getting the assistance and perspectives of others in the group. A systematic process for solving problems can be applied to many of the unique situations people face. (See box at left for an example of a problem-solving process.)

Articulating the problem or decision point in some form is developing curriculum. The learners can write down, tape record, or discuss the situation. They are describing **scenarios**, and it often helps to encourage them to visualize and "replay" a scenario in their mind almost like a videotape, describing it as it plays out and including their thoughts and reactions as well. (In fact, another option is to role play and videotape the scenario.) It may be most comfortable to begin with situations that are not highly personal or emotionally charged, because the next step is to share the scenario to find out if it is clear to others. This leads to discussion and refinement, full of opportunity for building communication and teamwork skills. (In the boxes at left and on the next page are examples of scenarios.)

A scenario might also be termed a **case study**, especially if it is more lengthy or complex. And, if the situation has some characteristics of reality but is generated for the purpose of acting out or practicing in a "safe" environment, it becomes a **simulation**. Simulations can be simple and brief (mini-simulations) or lengthy and complex. (In the box on the next page is an example of a simulation.)

Scenario: A Working Mother's Dilemma

For the sixth day in the past three weeks, the local schools have cancelled classes due to snow and cold weather, causing Evelyn, a single parent, to miss work on three occasions. When Evelyn doesn't work, she doesn't get paid. Earlier in the year, Evelyn's 6-year-old son had the mumps, and she missed several days at her part-time job when she was unable to arrange for her mother or her neighbor, Sue, to stay with him. During her son's illness, she also missed most of her GED preparation classes. Although Evelyn's boss is understanding, she knows he is beginning to feel frustrated and she fears he may be thinking about replacing her. She is also afraid that she will not be ready to take the GED exam next month. She is beginning to wonder if she will ever be able to make a better life for herself and her three children. Your group has been asked to help Evelyn seek realistic solutions to her current situation.

A Vacation Simulation

A group of 14 neighbors has decided to take a one-week hiking vacation together in a state forest about 100 miles from home. You are one of a team of three who have volunteered to plan and guide the trip. The third day out, one of the neighbors, a single woman, comes to your team as you are reviewing the map for the day's trail. She announces in a panicky voice that her wallet is missing. She says it contains about $80.00 in cash, her traveler's checks, her driver's license, and all her credit cards. She thinks she might have left it at a rest site along the trail where the group stopped the day before and she made a credit card call. The group is looking to your team to decide how to handle the situation.

Steps in Developing a Scenario

1. Identify desired characteristics.
   (Consider medium, level of communication or reading, materials and equipment, classroom or beyond)

2. Select a topic.
   (What needs to be accomplished? What has gone wrong? What are people struggling with? What dilemmas have they been in? Where do they need more time, more resources, less stress?)

3. Describe the setting.
   (What do people need to know about the environment?)

4. Describe the situation.
   (What is the background and what are the facts?)

5. Describe the roles of different people in the situation.
   (Who is involved? What responsibilities do they have or think they have? What are their feelings about them?)

6. Identify the problem or goal.
   (A decision to be made? Priorities set? Error corrected?)

7. State the criteria for the solution or outcome.
   (For example, quality, accuracy, speed)

8. Decide how much "help" to include.
   (Break down the problem and provide directions or basic skills information for the solution process? Show a method that leads to one correct or acceptable solution? Show a sample of a completed product?)

9. Provide closure.
   (Say, in concrete terms, what to do with the solution. Explain the real consequences and why they are important.)

Construct Projects

Once a situation is articulated and refined, it can be the basis for a variety of projects. Different small groups can address the same situation, each developing their own approach to achieve a designated goal. This technique can make it apparent that most goals can be achieved in more than one way. It will also become clear that multiple perspectives are usually helpful in learning how to proceed toward a goal.

It is essential that learners—

- reflect on the goal
- determine on their own how to reach the goal
- take stock of their own materials and resources
- seek out other resources and assistance

You are invaluable as a guide to the process, most often through probing questions and suggestions of sources of information and options to consider. Part of your role is to insert the "nugget" of an idea that will trigger creative thought and elicit chains of ideas from the learners. You are subtly and skillfully helping to construct a scaffold, but allowing the content within it to evolve from the learners themselves.

Although parts of this process can be accomplished individually, the experience is rich in learning potential for small groups who can follow these steps:

1. Brainstorm all aspects of the task. (Practice in analysis is, in itself, a learning activity.)

2. Assign research and information-seeking activities. (The process of completing activities builds skills and makes products available to foster learning for others.)

3. Decide on the best form for materials. (Criteria involve metacognition—learning about learning.)

4. Assign development activities so as to maximize learning by participation and authentic experience.

    - If written materials are to be drafted, learners can exchange them for review and "pilot test."

- If a step-by-step procedural task guide would help for a particular task that is new or problematic, the group can think through the needed steps together.

- If directions are to be developed, the group might talk together about where to find answers to questions, then assign the write-up to one member. They might then review and edit the result together.

- Performance or "doing" should be encouraged for active participation and authentic experience. For example, the group might ask another group to perform the task by following the directions.

- Demonstration or modeling is a means of teaching each other; a running verbal commentary on the thought processes involved adds a metacognitive benefit.

At any step along the way, you can demonstrate skills or process yourself; you are not denying or hiding your ability to contribute your expertise, merely making it clear that you do not have a monopoly on the expertise. In addition, the learners should consider who else can lend expertise. They can arrange to observe and/or interview others and seek information from outside their usual boundaries.

Ongoing Assessment

Vehicles for continuing reflection on progress toward the goal should be built into the group's thinking about process. Individuals can develop self-assessment checklists that reflect the roles they are to play in the group's work. These can be shared in advance of conducting the actual work as a means of clarifying and setting expectations, used for self-monitoring along the way, and completed as an evaluation at the conclusion of the work.

Keeping a daily journal of activities, progress, and thoughts about them is another way to foster reflection, writing practice, and documentation skills. Journals can form part of an approach to learner assessment. But these can also move beyond individual assessment if

shared. The group can use them as the basis to discuss their own interaction and how well their process and selected approaches are working. The outcome should be improved understanding of their own learning.

Summary

Participatory education is a process through which teachers and students educate one another. This exchange can take place only if the tools and techniques used are also participatory. . . . The tools and techniques used in participatory education are not in themselves recipes for education. Our experiences as teachers have taught us to view them in the context of the class and of the life issues being addressed in the classroom.

(Nash et al. 1992, p. 19)

A learner-generated curriculum incorporates the widely accepted but not-as-widely applied teaching-learning principles derived from the findings of cognitive science, the basis of educational reform for learners of all ages. In addition to being participatory for the learners, it provides for learner initiative and choice about what "needs" to be learned and how it should be best approached. It builds on prior knowledge, provides context, nurtures creativity and collaboration, and helps learners learn to learn.

As learners in a group address how they can learn collaboratively in the context of tasks for which they share an understanding, skills, and responsibility and as they are encouraged to select the goals they want to reach and the problems they are interested in solving, the potential positive implications loom large. If people can be teamed together around a common goal, given support systems, tools, and the information they need—or at least some clues about where to find what they are not given—and set loose to achieve the goal, they are more likely to pool their expertise creatively and figure out how to "get there." Further, they are likely to have a significant learning experience in the process. Thinking through a situation, organizing to deal with it, and carrying out what is decided cooperatively are core skills needed by everyone today and tomorrow, and they are the "stuff" of which learning is made.

6. Staff Development to Support Small Group Learning

Staff development is a critical element in successful implementation of the small group learning approach. Staff need to be prepared for and then supported in implementing small group learning. Any enthusiasm generated for using the small group approach during initial training is likely to wane without ongoing support. This chapter provides some general suggestions about appropriate staff development activities for the small group learning approach from both the administrative and teacher perspective. Many of the resources cited in Appendix A can be used in planning and implementing staff development activities.

Staff Development: The Administrative Perspective

Because using the small group learning approach represents a departure from traditional methods of instruction in ABLE, teachers need staff development in use of groups. Teachers who are content with the status quo will not seek information where they do not see a need, so staff development should be proactive. Once teachers have begun using the small group learning approach, staff development can serve as reinforcement and relieve any isolation they may be feeling about using small groups. Staff development can be offered as part of regular staff meetings and visits can be arranged to observe classes where groups are used successfully.

When introducing the small group learning approach, you should be realistic about the problems involved in small groups. The advantages and disadvantages listed on pages 8 through 13 in Chapter 1 of this guide can be used to provide teachers with a balanced perspective on the approach. You should also emphasize that the first bad experience with group work should not deter its use. Suggested approaches to staff development and training include the following:

- During any training or staff development activity, model the techniques that you expect teachers to use, i.e., small group work, collaborative facilitation, and so forth. Be sure to include ample time for processing the techniques as well as the content covered.

- Provide training and staff development through experiential learning that allows teachers to "try out" small groups. As a part of this experience, teachers can be matched with peers with whom they can exchange visits for the purpose of observation and feedback. Instead of onsite visits, teachers might arrange for exchanges of videos of themselves using small groups.

- Use role play in training by asking participants to assume group roles such as facilitator, recorder, timekeeper, and so forth. Ask them to take roles that they would not ordinarily assume when they are a member of a group. For example, if they usually volunteer to take notes, tell them that they should play another role besides recorder. Provide enough role play exercises that they can assume a number of different roles. Allow sufficient time to process how they felt, asking them to think about how their learners might feel when they work in groups (Bingman et al. 1990).

- Plan a workshop in which teachers can exchange ideas for small group learning activities. As a part of the workshop, have the participants try out their ideas as a means of providing practice in small group facilitation and small group membership.

- If possible, use computers to link teachers who are using the small group learning approach. Someone who has responsibility for staff development can serve as the discussion moderator. Through electronic discussions, teachers can ask questions, provide tips, solve problems, and share learning strategies.

- Encourage teachers to keep a journal of their experiences with using the small group learning approach. Although the journals should be private, you can plan staff development sessions in which teachers can reflect on their experiences as recorded in their journals, sharing as much as they choose. Like electronic discussions, journals can be a source of information for learning activities, problem definition and alternative solutions, and tips for working with small groups.

Staff Development: The Teacher Perspective

Teachers who are either using or thinking of using the small group learning approach can participate in planning and managing their staff development. If you do not have administrative support for the approach, you will undoubtedly need to be more active in seeking out opportunities to learn about and practice small group learning.

Taking charge of your staff development involves developing a plan, identifying resources, and receiving feedback. Developing a plan encourages you to address your staff development activities in a proactive manner and provides a framework for the commitment needed to achieve your goal of learning about and using the small group learning approach. You will also need to identify resources to carry out your plan, including print and nonprint materials, staff development opportunities, and other ABLE personnel. Feedback is necessary in order to see what progress you are making toward your goal. Although self-assessment can be one means of receiving feedback, involving others is also important (Imel 1990).

See Appendix B for a more complete description of this process as described in ERIC Digest No. 98, ***Managing Your Professional Development: A Guide for Part-Time Teachers of Adults***.

Some suggested activities for your staff development include the following:

- Form a network of others with whom you exchange information on using the small group approach. The network can include other teachers in your program, your supervisor, and professional colleagues you have met at conferences and staff development activities. If you are the only teacher in your program using small groups, you will have to reach out.

- Arrange for site visits to other classes or programs where the small group approach is being used. These visits can enhance your understanding of small groups and expand your professional network.

- Select one or two trusted teachers in your network to arrange for exchange of regular observation and feedback on use of the small group learning approach. You can learn from feedback others provide

on your practice as well as from observing how others use small groups.

- Attend conferences that offer workshops or sessions on using small groups. Participation in these activities will enable you to meet others, acquire information about resources, and receive reinforcement for using small groups.

- Develop a support group of others who are interested in the small group learning approach and arrange to meet on a regular basis. Use meetings to pose and solve problems, to exchange information about learning activities and resources, and to discuss successes and failures.

- Keep a journal of your experiences using the small group learning approach. A journal can serve as place to record your feelings as well as your ideas and observations related to small groups. It can help you "take the long view" and serve as a basis for reflection on your experiences.

- Become familiar with the resources available to you through the State or Regional Literacy Resource Center in your area. (See Appendix A for list of Ohio centers.) In addition to print resources, resource centers have staff who can answer questions or make referrals to other resources.

7. A Final Word

If you have read this far in the guide, by now you realize that using the small group learning approach has both advantages and disadvantages. Those of us involved in developing this guide—both the writers and the members of the focus group—believe that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. As a result of small group learning, we have seen many positive things happen for both learners and teachers: the whole really does equal more than the sum of the parts. However, we also acknowledge that using the approach requires a sense of adventure as well as a commitment to try something new and different. We also know that using the small group learning approach is not tidy and that it frequently raises more questions than it answers. But, when it works, it can result in one of the most exhilarating learning experiences both learners and facilitators can have.

Using the small group learning approach turns teachers into facilitators and co-learners. You will learn from your students, which is something "all good teachers do" (Clarke 1991a, p. 11). Some things Clarke has learned from her students include—

- a much richer grasp of how the English language works as a result of her students' questions, discussions, and explorations of the language
- new vocabulary and idioms
- deeper knowledge of topics under discussion and study, no matter how much she knew in advance
- as a result of feedback, more about the art and science of teaching
- personal things, such as living her life more slowly from older learners, and humanity and diversity from students not like her in age, race, or class

For learners, the small group learning approach approximates how they learn in real life. It also creates the type of situation in which they will be applying or using their knowledge. It can also serve as a retention tool because it provides them a means of affiliation with other members of the group.

Although we believe in and support the small group learning approach, we also realize that you may still

have reservations about it. Our advice to you is to try it, but in a way that is comfortable for you and your learners. We have tried to present a number of options for using small groups and encouraged you to think of it on a continuum with "teacher/facilitator in control" at one end and "learners in control" at the other. You are the best judge of where you personally fit on this continuum as well as what will be most comfortable for the learners.

Regardless of how you decide to proceed with small groups, you and the learners must be prepared for the experience. We hope that you will use the guide and the resources listed in Appendix A to support your use of the small group learning approach.

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Appendix A

Annotated Bibliography

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. ***Teaching Groups: A Basic Education Handbook.*** London, England: ALBSU, 1982. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 281 058)

This handbook offers a variety of ideas for group work in basic education: starting points, using common interests and experiences, developing a specific skill, talking and discussing in groups, the tutor's role, coping with conflict and silences, writing in groups, dealing with mixed groups, group leadership, evaluating group work, and problems encountered by group tutors.

Auerbach, E. R. ***Making Meaning, Making Change. Participatory Curriculum Development for ESL Literacy.*** Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education, 1992. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 356 688)

This guide to participatory curriculum development raises issues associated with the varied needs of limited-literacy students by explaining the principles of the participatory approach and discussing program structure, examining the participatory cycle in action. It addresses how to find student themes and how to develop curriculum around them; it also looks at how students can use literacy to make meaningful change in their lives.

Bingman, M. B.; Merrifield, J.; White, C.; and White, L. ***A Teacher in a Different Way. Group Literacy Instruction in Tennessee.*** Knoxville: Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee, 1990. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 326 672)

This report on workshops on group literacy instruction conducted for literacy coordinators, teachers, volunteers, and students in eastern Tennessee shares insights and experiences of the participants on what works in group instruction. It includes specific information on organization groups, recruiting and retaining students, choosing content and materials, working with students who learn

differently, defining and assessing success, and training volunteers and teachers.

Boraks, N. "Reading Instruction for Adult Groups with Varied Reading Levels." ***Adult Literacy and Basic Education*** 13, no. 3 (1989): 136-145.

The multitext approach to teaching reading to diverse groups of adults involves the teacher in selecting a topic and several books. Students follow a seven-step process that actively engages them in defining their knowledge of the topic and taking responsibility for reading a text to answer questions about it.

Bouton, C., and Garth, R. Y., eds. ***Learning in Groups. New Directions for Teaching and Learning No. 14.*** San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1983.

Nine chapters explore standard objections and myths about using learning groups and address writing through collaboration, active learning through conversation, and issues of student participation and teacher power.

Cheatham, J., and Lawson, V. K. ***Small Group Tutoring: A Collaborative Approach for Literacy Instruction.*** Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, 1990. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 319 918)

This manual for Literacy Volunteers of America tutors addresses the following topics: factors to consider in forming small groups, getting the group started, tutor and learner responsibilities, goal setting, evaluation, recordkeeping, lesson planning, how group work changes over time, and the effectiveness of collaborative group instruction.

Clark, D., and Lawson, V. K., eds. ***Small Group Tutoring: Basic Reading. Administrator's Guide.*** Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, 1990.

This companion volume to Cheatham and Lawson (1990) presents questions for administrators to consider before using small groups in literacy tutoring, manage-

ment of small groups in literacy programs, program decisions to be made, and organizing the training.

Clarke, M. ***Discovery and Respect: A Handbook for Student-directed Group Learning***. Seattle, WA: Goodwill Literacy Adult Learning Center, 1991a. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 355 346)

The seven sections of this handbook cover the following: philosophy of the student-directed approach, learner-centered education, reading theory, methodology for teaching reading, teaching writing, multicultural and class sensitivity, and designing lessons for adult beginning readers.

Ennis, R., and Davison, D. ***A Life of Its Own. Adult Literacy Work in Small Groups***. Melbourne, Australia: Workplace Basic Education Project, Council of Adult Education, [1989]. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 330 847)

At the center of this publication on an Australian small group learning methodology project are six case studies of varied groups: a beginner literacy group experimenting with structure, a women's group in a neighborhood house, the reading to writing to reading approach, using new genres and conventions in developing the writing habit, getting started with a beginning reading group, and integrating literacy, numeracy, language, and students' shopping and cooking experience.

Gillespie, M. ***Many Literacies: Modules for Training Adult Beginning Readers and Tutors***. Amherst: Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts, 1990. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 324 463)

Modules developed in a community-based literacy program are presented in four sections: (1) group activities for creating a community of learners; (2) one-to-one goal setting conferences and individual learning contracts; (3) activities to examine participants' reading history and to acquaint students with what good readers do; and (4) activities for writing, publishing, and sharing student work.

Goddard, R.; Marr, B.; and Martin, J. ***Strength in Numbers: A Resource Book for Teaching Adult Numeracy***. Blackburn, Victoria, Australia: Eastern Metropolitan Council of Further Education; Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Ministry of Education and Training, September 1991. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 345 941)

This resource for teaching basic mathematics to adults assumes little knowledge of formal math by teachers, tutors, and students and provides a rationale and strategies for the inexperienced teacher. Emphasizing interaction and cooperative learning, the activities are arranged in six sections: getting started, exploring numbers, addition, and subtraction, multiplication and division, money and metrics, and fractions and percentages.

Nash, A.; Cason, A.; Rhum, M.; McGrail, L.; and Gomez-Sanford, R. ***Talking Shop: A Curriculum Sourcebook for Participatory Adult ESL.*** Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1992. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 356 687)

Written by community-based adult basic education teachers, these accounts of teaching and learning experiences focus on the following: the importance of articulation as a survival skill, the immigrant experience, the mother-child relationship as a curriculum topic and means of involving parents in children's learning, and teaching techniques and approaches.

Ottoson, G. et al. ***Tutoring Small Groups: Basic Reading.*** Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, 1985. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 292 945)

This guide for literacy tutors provides techniques related to the following: organizing a group, the role of the reading tutor in the five stages of group dynamics, instructional methodology and materials, recordkeeping and lesson planning for small groups, and advice from literacy instructors.

Parma City Schools. ***You Can Be in a Group and Still Not Cooperate. Collaborative Approaches and Cooperative Learning Activities for Adult Learning.***

Parma, OH: Adult and Continuing Education, Parma City Schools, 1993.

This handbook defines and describes collaborative approaches and cooperative techniques. It provides learning activities for programs in English as a second language, adult basic education, and General Educational Development.

Rutland, A. M., and Guglielmino, L. M. ***Increasing Readiness for Self-Directed Learning: A Facilitator's Manual for Ten Self-Directed Learning Group Modules for Adults.*** Boca Raton, FL: Adult Education Division, Florida Atlantic University, May 1987. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 324 466)

Facilitators of self-directed learning groups will find in this manual tips for working with small groups, instructions for group facilitation and preparation of the 10 sessions, a flipchart master list for the sessions, resources on self-directed learning and self-concept, and a questionnaire for evaluating the group process.

Zander, A. ***Making Groups Effective.*** San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1982.

This book identifies qualities of effective groups and steps for group leaders to follow. Practical advice is given for handling such concerns as making groups stronger, setting realistic goals, facilitating discussion, resolving internal conflicts, and coping with external pressures.

State Literacy Resource Centers

Ohio Literacy Resource Center
414 White Hall
Kent State University
P.O. Box 5190
Kent, OH 44242-0001
Jane M. Schierloh
(216) 672-2007; (800) 765-2897

Regional Resource Centers

Northeast Ohio:

Euclid City ABLE Shore Cultural Center
651 East 222nd Street
Euclid, OH 44123
Delores Tekeili/Gloria Gillette
(216) 261-2900, Ext. 244

Northwest Ohio:

Owens Technical College
P.O. Box 10,000
Toledo, OH 43699-1947
Linda Stacy
(419) 666-6163, Ext. 387

Southeast Ohio:

College of Education
McCracken Hall
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701-2979
Edward Stevens/Alice Blake-Stalker
(614) 593-4470

Southwest Ohio:

Project: READ
Sinclair Community College
444 West Third Street, Room 12301
Dayton, OH 45402-1460
Karla Hibbert-Jones
(513) 449-5123

Appendix B

ERIC DIGEST No. 98

EDO-CE-90-98

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

MANAGING YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT A GUIDE FOR PART-TIME TEACHERS OF ADULTS

Professional development is a continuing process consisting of activities that enhance professional growth. It may include workshops, independent reading and study, conferences, and consultation with peers and experts. Since its primary purpose is to benefit the individual, professional development should be planned and managed by the individual. As a part-time teacher of adults, you may develop your professional development plan in consultation with your supervisor, and you may receive help from others in evaluating and modifying teaching practices. On the other hand, since you may be working in relative isolation from other teachers and administrators, you may need to take sole responsibility for your professional development (Jones and Lowe 1982). Whether you work collaboratively or individually, you should be involved in identifying your professional development needs and in deciding what strategies to use to address those needs. Developed in conjunction with the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, this **ERIC Digest** provides information that you can use in planning and managing your professional development. First, the following aspects of professional development are covered: developing a plan, identifying resources, and receiving feedback. Some research- and practice-based guidelines that can be used in managing your professional development activities conclude the **Digest**.

Aspects of Professional Development

Taking charge of your professional development means that you will take responsibility for planning and carrying out a number of activities. Three important aspects of professional development--developing a plan, locating resources, and receiving feedback--are described here.

Developing a Plan

Developing a plan for professional development is essential because it will encourage you to address your professional self-improvement activities in a proactive manner. It will also provide a framework for the discipline and commitment needed to achieve the planned changes inherent in any professional development program (Jones and Lowe 1985).

The Personal Professional Development Model (Jones and Lowe 1982, 1985) is a planning process that has been used successfully by part-time teachers in achieving their professional development goals. The model consists of four phases: initiating, planning, managing, and evaluating. Three of the stages are reflective, that is, they involve contemplation and reflection to answer a series of questions. In only one stage--managing--is there activity. Each phase is accomplished by addressing a series of steps as follows:

Initiating Phase (Reflective)

- What do I hope to accomplish?
- What are my learning objectives?
- What is my potential payoff?

Planning Phase (Reflective)

- What resources are available to me?
- What will be my learning activities?
- How will I judge the success of this project?

Managing Phase (Active)

- Complete each activity in the planning phase
- Organize and interpret data
- Record progress and/or report findings

Evaluative Phase (Reflective after the fulfillment of plan)

- To what extent did I achieve my objectives?
- To what extent did I select and pursue appropriate learning activities?
- What are my learning needs now? (Jones and Lowe 1985, p. 82)

Answering the questions in the initiating and planning phases can help commit you to a plan of action for your professional development. The managing and evaluative phases can be used to describe the outcomes of your project.

Teachers who used this model reported a number of advantages. First, they accomplished more because the model contributed to their organization and discipline in achieving their objectives. The model also provided structure and emphasized their responsibility for their own learning. Finally, the model reduced procrastination (Jones and Lowe 1985).

Identifying Resources

Successful implementation of a professional development plan requires resources. You will need to identify the resources to carry out your professional development plan. These resources might include print and nonprint materials, staff development opportunities, and other adult educators.

In New Mexico, adult basic education teachers engaged in self-directed professional development activities found human resources to be of key importance in their projects. Books and articles were also essential in their learning, and several used structured activities such as workshops or classes in accomplishing their goals (Smith and Bowes 1986).

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Receiving Feedback

Another important aspect of professional development is feedback. Feedback is necessary in order to see what progress you are making toward your goals and objectives. Although self-assessment can be one means of receiving feedback, it is important to involve others in this process as well. Adult basic education teachers have identified receiving feedback in a non-threatening environment as a key element in successful professional development efforts (Lowe 1990a; Smith and Bowes 1986).

Guidelines for Managing Your Professional Development

The following guidelines for managing your professional development are derived from research and practices cited in the literature (Bowes 1984; Jones and Lowe 1985, 1990; Lowe 1990a,b; *Principles and Techniques for Effective ABE Staff Development* 1988; Smith and Bowes 1986).

1. Prepare for professional development activities by defining what is to be learned; deciding how to proceed; selecting methods, activities, and resources; securing your supervisor's support; and thinking through logistical considerations such as time, place, and pacing. This advance planning will help ensure success.

2. In developing your plan, begin by writing only one or two sentences about what you hope to accomplish and stating no more than three objectives. You will avoid frustration by not attempting too much at one time.

3. Be aware that such factors as lack of time, resources, or administrative support may deter or hinder your professional development. Acknowledging that such factors exist is the first step in overcoming them.

4. Form a network of individuals who can provide ongoing feedback on the types of changes you are trying to make. The network can include other teachers in your program, your supervisor, and professional colleagues you have met at conferences and staff development activities.

5. Attend a professional conference as a part of your plan for professional development. Conferences are excellent places to meet people who have similar interests and to find out about new resources. Since conference attendance alone is not likely to change your performance, develop follow-up and reinforcing mechanisms such as keeping in touch with the people you meet, acquiring and using the resources, and so forth.

6. Enlist the assistance of colleagues at your work site. They can provide the support, resources, and ongoing feedback required to implement new practices.

7. Make on-site visits to other programs. These visits can enhance your understanding of teaching practices and expand your professional network.

8. Select one of your peers to be your partner in learning a new technique or procedure. Working in pairs provides an opportunity to practice and receive feedback in a nonthreatening environment.

9. Join an adult education professional association. Professional associations provide publications such as newsletters and journals that serve as resources. They also sponsor conferences and workshops that offer opportunities for professional networking. For more information about professional associations in adult education, contact the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, 1112 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Suite 420, Washington, DC 20036.

10. Become familiar with the resources available through the ERIC system. ERIC, the Educational Resources Information Center, is a federally funded information system that collects and disseminates information on all aspects of education. A number of ERIC Clearinghouses provide free or low-cost resources that can be used to support your professional development. For more information on ERIC resources, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090.

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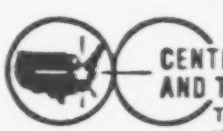
This **ERIC Digest** was developed in 1990 by Susan Imel with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RI88062005. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education. Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced.



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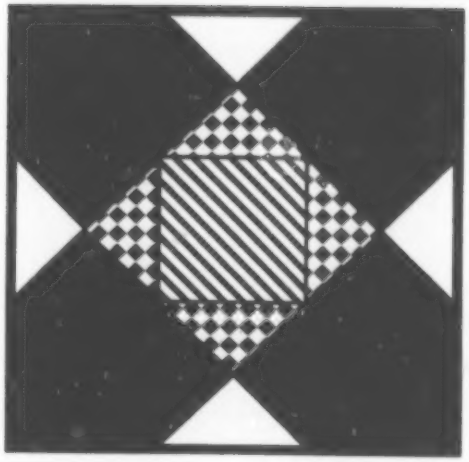

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